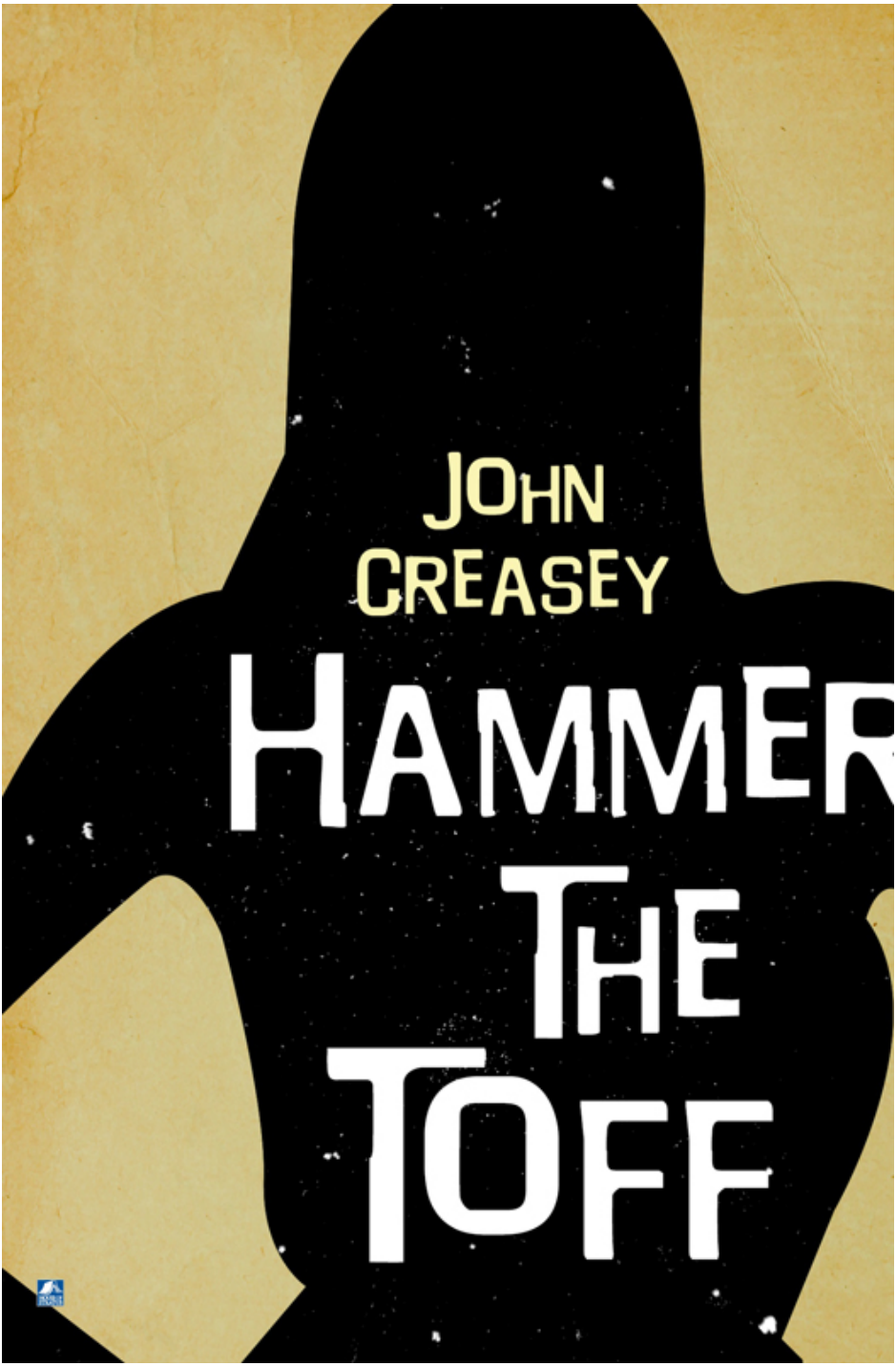
JOHN
CREASEY
HAMMER
THE
TOFF

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Hammer the Toff

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This is a fictional work and all characters are drawn from the author's imagination.
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About the Author

John Creasey – Master Storyteller - was born in Surrey, England in 1908 into a poor family in which there were nine children, John Creasey grew up to be a true master story teller and international sensation. His more than 600 crime, mystery and thriller titles have now sold 80 million copies in 25 languages. These include many popular series such as *Gideon of Scotland Yard, The Toff, Dr Palfrey and The Baron*.

Creasey wrote under many pseudonyms, explaining that booksellers had complained he totally dominated the 'C' section in stores. They included:

> *Gordon Ashe, M E Cooke, Norman Deane, Robert Caine Frazer, Patrick Gill, Michael Halliday, Charles Hogarth, Brian Hope, Colin Hughes, Kyle Hunt, Abel Mann, Peter Manton, J J Marric, Richard Martin, Rodney Mattheson, Anthony Morton and Jeremy York.*

Never one to sit still, Creasey had a strong social conscience, and stood for Parliament several times, along with founding the *One Party Alliance* which promoted the idea of government by a coalition of the best minds from across the political spectrum.

He also founded the *British Crime Writers' Association*, which to this day celebrates outstanding crime writing. *The Mystery Writers of America* bestowed upon him the *Edgar Award* for best novel and then in 1969 the ultimate *Grand Master Award*. John Creasey's stories are as compelling today as ever.

Chapter One

Out of the Night

The train was rocking along at a tremendous pace. Too fast for the girl sitting opposite to Rollison.

'We'll be on time for once,' said her husband contentedly. He was a young, cheerful-looking Artillery officer.

'It's a good train,' said a man in the corner next to Rollison, 'and seldom more than ten minutes late.'

'Where are we?' asked the girl.

'Near Winchester,' said the man in the corner.

'We are slowing down, I think,' said the Artillery officer. He began to talk about the leave he was about to enjoy, but Rollison answered absently. He was thinking of Susan Lancaster, whom he knew was on the train; and of two Scotland Yard officers who were in a compartment a short way from his. Susan and the Scotland Yard men were seeking the same thing: a man who had disappeared.

A steward came along the corridor.

'Take your seats for the last dinner, please. Take your seats for—'

A sharp sound of breaking glass interrupted him. A hole appeared in the window, and glass flew in all directions.

Something hit the outside door with a sharp, staccato ping.

The train picked up speed while the passengers stared in stupefaction at the broken window. Inside the carriage there was no sound.

'W-what was it?' gasped the girl.

'Some fool throwing stones,' suggested the man in the corner, without much confidence.

'It sounded like a bullet to me,' said the girl's husband, grimly. He opened the window and leaned out as the lights of Winchester station flashed by.

Rollison joined him.

There was a groove in the wooden frame, and something was

buried there: a small bullet. The swaying of the train prevented him from making more than a brief inspection, and he straightened up. The guard came in, treading on glass which littered the floor.

'What has been happening here?' he demanded.

'He can tell you,' said Rollison, with a wave of his hand towards the Artillery officer. 'I'll be back.'

He hurried along the corridor. In the third compartment he recognised Det. Sergeant Barrow of New Scotland Yard and a detective officer recently from the police college.

There was no love lost between Sergeant Barrow and Richard Rollison, but now Barrow looked up with an air of puzzled relief.

'Did you hear those bumps?'

'Yes, and I've seen one of the bullets that caused them,' said Rollison. 'Which carriage is Miss Lancaster in?'

'She's gone along to the diner.'

Rollison left the sergeant feeling more than a little angry. True, the detective had no instructions to watch Susan; on the other hand Barrow knew that it was possible that she was indirectly involved in a mystery which had attracted the attention of the police for some weeks past: the disappearance of Bruce Drayton.

It seemed to Rollison that there was a possibility, if a slim one, that the shots had either been fired at the Yard men, or at Susan. It was even possible that they had been fired at himself, though he did not think anyone knew, as yet, that he was interested in Susan Lancaster's affairs. That was Susan's fault; she had deliberately cold-shouldered him for some time. Only Rollison's concern for her, allied to a natural curiosity, had sustained his interest.

The dining-car was nearly empty. Susan sat with her back to him, looking into a tiny mirror. She was so absorbed in her inspection – and, indeed, it was a charming sight – that she did not look up when he took the seat opposite her.

'Very nice indeed,' murmured Rollison.

She flushed, thrust her mirror into her handbag, and made to get up. But the train rocked, and she was forced to sit down again.

'There you are, you see, fate's against you,' said Rollison.

‘Spare me five minutes, even if—’

‘I’ve told you before that I have no desire at all to see you,’ said Susan, furiously. ‘Don’t you think I’m old enough to look after myself?’

‘Old enough, yes. Experienced enough, no.’

‘You’re insufferable!’

‘Not so very long ago …’ murmured Rollison.

‘I didn’t really know you then,’ she said quickly. I didn’t realise you were the most conceited, objectionable, thick-skinned and—and—’ she paused, drawing a deep breath.

‘Insufferable creature in the world,’ Rollison suggested.

‘Yes, you are!’

‘I wish I knew what was upsetting you,’ said Rollison. ‘You’re not yourself, Susan.’

‘I’m not myself! You—you think you’re so clever, you think you know better than the police, just because you’ve been lucky once or twice in detecting things, and made something of a reputation, and been taken up by one or two of the more sensational newspapers. Well, I don’t. I—’

Rollison said: ‘Are you going to see Bruce?’

His words made her break off again. She averted her gaze, and flushed deeply. This time she succeeded in getting out of her seat, and walked away from him, her head high in the air.

Curious glances were sent towards Rollison, and a middle-aged man grinned at him sympathetically. Rollison smiled back, but made no further attempt to force his attentions on Susan. She probably did not know that Yard men were on the train. And she had told him, by her attitude, that she expected – or hoped – to see Bruce.

Rollison sat thinking …

A few months earlier he had seen Susan at a party with Bruce Drayton, a scientist and an intellectual, who ought never to have come out of the back room. For half an hour Rollison had watched Drayton, noting the occasional curve of his lips, the sudden gleam of humour, judging there to be more in him than was commonly supposed.

After that, he had met them several times and formed a great liking for the man. What he was working on, no one seemed to know, until one day Rollison met them together in a small restaurant, and Susan had rushed over to his table.

‘Rolly, you’d never believe it!’

‘Wouldn’t I?’ asked Rollison.

‘Never! Look!’ She thrust out a shapely, silk-clad leg for his inspection. Bruce walked over, deprecatingly.

‘Not quite so loud,’ he protested.

Rollison had waved a hand and a waiter brought chairs.

‘Aren’t they marvellous?’ demanded Susan; her eyes glowing, ‘and they’re *not* silk or nylon, they’re *Silva-Sheen.* Bruce has just told me – he invented it!’

‘Did he, by George!’ exclaimed Rollison. ‘Congratulations, Bruce.’

‘Just stumbled on it,’ Bruce had murmured.

That was characteristic of Bruce Drayton; he had ‘just stumbled on’ an invention which rivalled nylon. He had developed it in a Government laboratory, and the story had been released only that day. Most of the papers had made much of it, but the most significant item had been a small paragraph mentioning the huge orders already executed for the export trade.

Then across the Atlantic had come a rumour: *Silva-Sheen* was already being made in America. Bruce had been greatly concerned. For three days *Silva-Sheen* had again hit the headlines, while the police were employed to trace the leakage.

The whole affair might have faded out of the news, but for the fact that Bruce disappeared.

He had walked out of his flat one morning to go to the office, and had not been seen again. Rollison had gone to see Superintendent Grice of Scotland Yard, whom he knew well. Grice had told him that there was still no reason at all to suspect that Drayton knew anything about the leakage of *Silva-Sheen,* but naturally the police wanted to find out where and why he had gone.

When Rollison had returned to his Gresham Terrace flat, Susan had been waiting for him, a despairing, desperate creature. She was sure Bruce was dead, she was terrified, she couldn’t live without him, Rollison must find him; and that and much more which, when sorted out, Rollison had thought proved nothing more than shock and alarm. For several days she had called on him and telephoned him every hour or so.

As abruptly as her visits begun, they ceased.

Rollison had been glad of a rest, for he had much to do. The police assured him that they were continuing their inquiries, and he was more or less content to let the matter rest there.

As the train sped on, Rollison recalled all that, and also the shock he had received one evening when he had taken a country cousin to a London night club. There he had seen Susan, apparently having the time of her life, in the company of a handsome, distinguished-looking man. In view of her frantic concern over the disappearance of Bruce Drayton it hardly made sense.

Rollison went over to speak to her, but she received him coldly. Her escort, it appeared, was a Colonel Horniman. A closer view showed him to be not quite so handsome as Rollison had thought. Nevertheless, Susan was clearly impressed.

From then on she had been inaccessible to Rollison. Try as he might, he could not find out how she had met Horniman, but it became increasingly evident that the gallant Colonel exerted considerable influence over her.

Rollison had made inquiries about the man, and even exchanged notes with Grice. The Colonel's reputation was, as Grice put it, 'fairly good'. He was interested in textiles; he was a director of one of the companies which held a manufacturing licence for *Silva-Sheen,* and he had many business associates abroad. Yet there were rumours about Horniman's business methods which certainly did not redound to his credit, and Susan, Rollison considered, was doing herself no good by associating so freely with him.

Horniman was now believed to be in Bournemouth.

Susan had left her flat late that afternoon and Rollison, now interested almost against his will, had followed her, heard her book for Bournemouth, and telephoned his man to send some clothes down on the next train. He had not been surprised to see the two Yard men on the platform. They might be going to see Horniman, or they might just have followed Susan, believing her to be going to see Bruce Drayton. It was a situation full of possibilities and one Rollison would have enjoyed but for Susan …

The dining-car door opened, and Barrow appeared. He was a tall, fair-haired man, not bad looking. In Rollison's opinion he thought too much of himself and he lacked the spark of humour

which could have been a touchstone between two men. Now he advanced purposefully along the car, and dropped into the seat Susan had just left.

'How are the inquiries going?' asked Rollison, lightly.

'You knew it was a bullet, didn't you?' demanded Barrow.

'And I told you about it,' said Rollison.

'Why did you rush away?'

'To make sure that Susan Lancaster was not hurt,' said Rollison. 'You might have taken the same precaution yourself.'

Barrow flushed. 'I know *my* business,' he said.

'Then leave me mine,' murmured Rollison. He judged from Barrow's manner that a storm was blowing up, and decided on propitiation. 'What do you make of it?'

'Those shots were fired at the train.'

'I agree,' said Rollison, gravely.

'And *probably* at our particular compartments,' said Barrow. 'We'll be at Southampton soon, and I'm going to have a look at the other compartments. There were several bangs, weren't there?'

'I heard half a dozen,' Rollison told him.

'And the train had slowed down at a point where it always does these days,' said Barrow. 'It's just beneath a road bridge. If anyone knew which compartments certain people were sitting in, they could have aimed at them.'

'Yes. But the question is, why should they?' asked Rollison.

'I don't know, yet,' said Barrow, as if that were a trivial problem which would soon be solved. 'I do know that if someone from London telephoned someone at Winchester and told them what compartment we were in, it could easily have been arranged. And from the bridge it's possible to look into the train and recognise the passengers. It wouldn't surprise me,' Barrow added sententiously, 'if someone wanted to prevent me from getting to Bournemouth.'

'Possibly,' murmured Rollison.

'Don't you agree?' demanded Barrow, bridling.

'It could be,' said Rollison, 'but when you look at it dispassionately, it would have to have been some pretty fancy shooting, because the train was moving, after all.'

'Only at about five miles an hour,' said Barrow, obstinately. 'It could have been fixed, all right.'

Rollison nodded, not wanting to argue; and he was glad when the train began to slow down. 'Southampton!' exclaimed Barrow, and hurried out.

Rollison alighted when the train stopped, and went up to examine the outside of the coaches. An excited group of people from his own and adjacent compartments crowded the platform.

It appeared to Rollison that at least half a dozen shots had been fired. Most of them had buried themselves in the coachwork.

'It is a fortunate thing that no one was hurt,' said one of the passengers. 'Young hooligans, I should say, playing games.'

'Rather older hooligans, *I* should say, and *not* playing games,' said the Artillery officer crisply. 'It looks as if someone meant business, don't you think so?' He appealed to Rollison.

'It takes some understanding,' answered Rollison, non-commitally. 'I—'

He stopped abruptly.

He had not gone along the corridor in the other direction, and did not know who was in the compartment next to his. Now he caught a glimpse of a handsome man with a thin, trap-like mouth: none other than Colonel Horniman. A small man, almost hunchbacked, was leaning inside the Colonel's compartment, and Rollison caught the words: 'Are you sure you're all right?'

'Don't be a fool,' growled Horniman.

'They scared me,' said the little man. 'I thought—'

Horniman snapped: 'Shut up!'

As he spoke, the guard's whistle blew and the station-master broke up the little crowd. The man who had been talking to Horniman turned and hurried along the platform. Rollison thought he boarded the train, but could not be sure. He did feel sure that it was Horniman who had been shot at.

Chapter Two

The Cottage

Rollison bade his travelling companions a cheerful goodbye as he watched Susan, the Yard men and Horniman. It seemed to him that Horniman did not want Susan to know that he was there; or he might, thought Rollison, have been anxious to avoid the police. Susan took a taxi to the Lorne Hall Hotel, the detective officer followed her and Barrow went off in a taxi by himself. Rollison heard him say: 'Police Station, Madeira Road,' as he got into the cab.

So Barrow was going to enlist the help of the local police, which suggested that he had high hopes of results.

Rollison waited in the shadows of the station, and at last Horniman came out. There was no taxi left, and Horniman asked a porter if it was far to the Lorne Hall Hotel,

Rollison decided that it was wiser that the man should not feel that he was being followed at every step, and waited until a taxi arrived, before he himself set out for Lorne Hall Hotel.

A friendly receptionist said she was afraid there was not an available room, but it was just possible there had been a cancellation; she would make sure. As she turned to look, Rollison glanced at the registration book, which was open in front of him. Horniman's was the last signature, just above was Susan's; he was about to look up when another signature caught his eye.

He stared at it. *E. M. Drayton* had signed on the previous day. A spark of excitement shot through him. He inspected it more closely, and saw a bracketed '*Mrs'* beside it. The address was given briefly as Chelsea.

Could the name Drayton be a coincidence?

'I'm very sorry, sir,' said the receptionist, 'but there's absolutely nothing. You might get something at the Norfolk or the Bath, and there's the Palace Court. Would you care to telephone?'

Rollison went to a booth and called the Norfolk Hotel. He was not surprised to find that Jolly, his man, had taken the precaution, of telephoning for a room; and as Rollison was not unknown at the Norfolk, one was at his disposal.

Not for the first time congratulating himself on the astuteness of his man Jolly, Rollison went to a shadowy corner, picked up a discarded newspaper and sat down, hiding his face from the lift and the foot of the stairs. He did not expect much to happen that night, but he wanted to see whether Horniman and Susan came down together. He was also burning with curiosity as to the identity of 'Mrs Drayton'.

After a quarter of an hour, he stifled a yawn. It looked as if nothing was likely to happen so late as this, and—

A man came in through the revolving doors, and he recognised the little fellow who had spoken to Horniman at Southampton Station. He looked less hunched, now, but was still remarkably round shouldered. But for that he would have been ordinary enough. He walked rapidly to the counter, and asked if Colonel Horniman had arrived.

He had, and had been in the hotel for half an hour.

'Tell him I am here, please.' The man gave his name, but Rollison could not catch it. 'He is expecting me.'

The man went to a chair near to Rollison, and took a newspaper from his pocket with a show of ease. Rollison moved unobtrusively to the door. He did not think the man recognised him as he went out.

A small car was standing outside the hotel, and by it was a porter.

'Can one park cars outside here?' Rollison asked innocently.

'No, sir, but it's only a gentleman who said he wouldn't be ten minutes,' said the porter.

Rollison nodded, and continued his way to the West Station where there were several taxis on hire.

'Taxi, sir?' asked one of the drivers. 'I may have a longish run,' Rollison warned him.

'That's all right, sir.' The driver of a rakish-looking cab opened the door. 'Take you anywhere you like – within reason, that is!'

Rollison smiled. 'I don't think I'll be unreasonable,' he assured the man, and got in. 'We'll go to the corner of the main road for

a start.'

They passed the little car, which was pointing towards the main road. Rollison took a pound note from his pocket, thrust it over the driver's shoulder, and said: 'I want to follow the car we've just passed, as unobtrusively as possible.'

'I *see,* sir.' The driver grinned knowingly as he tucked the note carefully into his pocket. They waited for five minutes before two men came out of the hotel and got into the car; Rollison recognised one of them as Horniman.

'Okay, sir?' asked the driver.

'Yes. Don't get too close.'

'We'll get in front of them,' murmured the driver, with relish. 'That way he won't know we're after 'im.'

'Nice work,' congratulated Rollison.

He felt a tremor of excitement as the cab swung into the main road. The little car followed. They took a turning to the left, into a one-way street and reached the Square. There the taxi let the little car pass, then gathered speed. Soon they reached another road junction, where a policeman on point duty held up the little car.

'Bit o' luck,' confided the driver.

They started off again.

'Christchurch Road now, sir. I hope 'e don't turn off, it can be a bit tricky on the cliff. Does he know Bournemouth, sir?'

'I'm not sure,' said Rollison.

The little car kept along the main road, making a fair speed. The driver allowed two other cars to get in front of him. Rollison looked both over as carefully as he could. He had a lightning suspicion that the passenger in one of them was Barrow. If that was so, then he, too, was tailing Horniman.

As they drove through Christchurch, he was sure of it. He wondered if the Colonel realised that he was being followed; if he did, this might prove a wild goose chase.

They were now doing fifty miles an hour, and Horniman's car was probably stretched to its limit. The police car was well behind it.

Then suddenly the leading car turned off on to a narrow New Forest by-road.

The police car followed. Rollison said: 'All right, after it.' They climbed a long, gradual hill. As the rear lights of both cars

disappeared over the brow, they showed up clearly. Too clearly.

Rollison was puzzled. Surely there was an unnatural glow, as of a fire, some distance off? As his own car breasted the hill, he saw that he was right, there *was* a fire, perhaps two miles away. He could see the tiny figures of people standing about it, and several cottages were silhouettes against the flames.

'Our man's slowing down,' said the driver, suddenly. 'By that burning cottage, sir. What a blaze!'

Rollison sat forward tensely. Undoubtedly Horniman's car was slowing down.

Someone was standing in the road, flagging it down.

Rollison thought that the driver was going to stop, but suddenly the car leapt forward again. The man in the road jumped aside. The police car tore past the burning cottage in pursuit and Rollison drew nearer.

'Straight on?' asked the driver.

Rollison hesitated.

''Ave to make up your mind quick!'

'Slow down,' said Rollison.

The driver pulled into the side of the road. A man disengaged himself from a little group of people and hurried forward. He declaimed bitterly against the two previous cars which had dashed past without stopping. Would Rollison go to the next village, half a mile along, and jerk up the fire-station? If pumps didn't arrive soon, the fire …

In the distance there was the clanging note of a fire-engine.

'Oh, here it is!' The man gave a breathy sigh of relief. 'So it's all right, sir, and thank you.'

'Everyone out?' asked Rollison, looking at the flames.

'That's what worries me,' said the villager. 'Young gent lives there. But I *thought* I heard a car an hour ago, he might have gone out.'

The driver said gruffly: 'Well, if anyone's in there, he's had it.'

The roof had already crashed in, and now only the skeleton of the building remained, the windows like gaping eye sockets, doors burning furiously. As they watched, the walls fell inwards. When at last the fire-engine swung into the narrow street there was little they could do.

'I'm afraid you've lost your man, sir,' said the taxi driver, Rollison looked at him.

‘Have I?’ he asked.

The firemen began to fix their hoses and to spray the adjoining cottages. Rollison walked up to them.

‘When can you find out if anyone was in there?’ he asked.

‘Not for half an hour yet, unless he happened to be near the window,’ said one of the men briefly.

‘How long had the young man been here?’ asked Rollison.

‘A month,’ cut in one of the on-looking villagers eagerly. ‘Just a month today, nice-looking young chap he was, too.’

‘What did he look like?’ asked Rollison.

The villager was vague. Darkish, but not really dark, quite good-looking but not what you would call handsome, rather thin and worried, but perhaps he was suffering from nerves. A lot of young people were suffering from nerves …

Rollison took a photograph of Bruce Drayton from his pocket, praying that he was not the man he feared.

The villager fiddled madly with his spectacles, but they were on at last, and he held out his hand for the photograph – and nearly dropped it.

‘Why, that’s *him*!’ he cried, ‘that’s him!’

An hour later the Chief Officer of the N.F.S. party looked about the glowing embers, glanced at Rollison, and nodded significantly.

Chapter Three

Shock for Susan

Rollison sat in the back of the taxi, almost convinced that Bruce Drayton was dead. He would have been quite convinced, had not the villagers assured him that someone had driven up to the cottage and visited Drayton a short time before the fire. It was therefore possible that Drayton had left, and the visitor had been trapped. Identification would take days, perhaps weeks; bones, dentistry, previous scars having to be investigated.

The police would have to work out those details.

Barrow had not driven back past the fire; nor had Horniman. Rollison felt sure that Horniman had gone to see Bruce, had been horrified at the sight of the fire and, after slowing down, had suddenly decided to drive past as if it were no concern of his. Perhaps he had realised belatedly that he was being followed.

The driver of Rollison's taxi pulled up outside the Lorne Hall, and Rollison, jerked suddenly out of his reverie, remembered that he was staying at the Norfolk. He decided that a walk would do him good, and that he might as well find out for certain whether Horniman was back.

He paid the man generously, and the taxi drove off. As Rollison approached the hotel entrance, Barrow moved out of the shadowed porch.

'Where have you been?' he asked, brusquely.

Rollison hesitated a moment, and then decided to tell him all he knew. It was a wise move, for as his story progressed, Barrow's dislike faded; he made notes and, after five minutes, hurried agitatedly into the hotel to telephone Scotland Yard.

Rollison followed him.

Horniman had been back for some time, it proved, and had dropped his passenger in the Square. Barrow had discovered 'Mrs Drayton' had stayed at the hotel and caught a late train to London. A waiter was able to tell Rollison that Susan and Mrs

Drayton had spent part of the evening together.

Rollison dreaded telling Susan the latest development. He decided to wait until the morning.

Susan did not believe him.

She sat opposite him at the Norfolk Hotel next morning, drinking coffee. He had persuaded her to spare him half an hour, much against her will, but she had not talked freely until he had told her about the fire. It shocked her so much that, within ten minutes, he knew much of what had happened. She had come down to see Bruce's mother who, Horniman had told her, had recently seen Bruce himself. She had not known Mrs Drayton before, and had believed her to be in America. Susan had liked her. She had gathered that Mrs Drayton was worried about Bruce's disappearance, but Horniman had assured them both, at different times, that Bruce was keeping out of the public eye of his own accord. Horniman had hinted that he was working on a fabric even more revolutionary than *Silva-Sheen,* that he was financed by several textile manufacturers and, after the leakage of information about *Silva-Sheen,* had preferred to work in secrecy.

'Why didn't Horniman tell the police this?' Rollison asked.

Susan said: 'The police didn't do much about the leakage of *Silva-Sheen*, did they? Bruce preferred that no one should know where he was. Rolly, where's Horniman now?'

Rollison was glad to hear the friendly 'Rolly', but made no comment about it.

'Being interviewed by the police,' he said. 'He may be back soon. Susan, don't trust Horniman.'

'I think you're prejudiced against him,' said Susan, sharply. 'And—and I just don't believe that Bruce is dead. He *can't* be dead!'

'I hope he isn't,' said Rollison, slowly.

He walked with Susan to the Lorne Hall. She went up to her room, worried, frightened, less hostile than she had been, but hostile enough.

The Scotland Yard man was in the Hall, but there was no sign of Barrow. Rollison, hoping to see Horniman, sat in the lounge and looked through the morning papers, none of which mentioned the fire. He had been there for half an hour when

Horniman came in.

Rollison was startled; for Horniman, was the picture of contentment, as if *his* interview with the police had gone off very well indeed.

Susan and Horniman took the 2.20 train to London,

On the following morning, Rollison sat at his desk in the living-room of his Gresham Street flat; Jolly was with him. Between them lay the accumulation of three days' correspondence.

There were many people who looked upon Rollison as one of the idle rich, but this was far from being the case. Rich he might be, but idle never. Nevertheless he found it useful to assume sometimes the role of a man-about-town.

Jolly looked at him glumly. He was, to all intents and purposes, a glum man; and especially so that morning.

'Sit down, Jolly,' said Rollison, affably. 'We'll open them together. Three piles: one for prompt attention, one for anything that can wait, and one for donations and subscriptions.'

After twenty minutes Rollison looked at the growing piles and shook his head.

'It's too much,' he said.

'The correspondence *is* becoming somewhat excessive,' murmured Jolly.

'Either we must cut down or get help,' said Rollison. 'I just don't want to plod through this. I want to think about the Drayton business. And yet—'

'It will become unmanageable if it is left unattended much longer,' said Jolly lugubriously.

'We need a stenographer,' announced Rollison.

'I could telephone an agency and arrange for someone to come part-time,' Jolly suggested.

Rollison shook his head.

'It's no use, Jolly, part-time help won't see us through. Look through the advertisements in *The Times*, will you, and write to anyone who sounds promising.'

'Very good, sir,' said Jolly austerely. He was not pleased. 'Er … you require a young woman, I assume, sir,'

'Well, I don't know, Jolly, a girl might brighten us up a bit. Flowers and things.' He laughed at Jolly's expression. 'All right, males only for a start, but get the letters off today,'

‘Certainly, sir. You may leave that to me.’

Rollison glanced through the correspondence when the man had gone, glad that he had decided to increase his staff, yet sympathising with Jolly, who had held sway at the flat for the last twelve years.

The front-door bell rang shrilly.

A familiar voice came to him.

‘Good morning, Jolly! Is he in?’

‘To you, I think, sir.’

There was a tap on the door, and Superintendent Grice, a tall, brown-clad man with a scar on the right side of his face, appeared. That scar was a souvenir of a case on which both he and Rollison had worked. Now he came in breezily, refusing a cigarette but agreeing to a cup of coffee.

He glanced at the correspondence.

‘Busy, I see,’

‘I shouldn’t have gone to Bournemouth,’ said Rollison, ‘the work piles up too quickly. But I’m getting a secretary.’

Grice grinned. ‘That will put Jolly’s nose out of joint.’

‘A little crudely put,’ reproved Rollison, ‘but I agree tact may be necessary.’

Grice waved a hand, as if to dismiss the matter. ‘Well, whether you could afford the time or not, I’m glad you went to Bournemouth. We might not have discovered that Drayton was down there if it had been left to Barrow.’

‘Aren’t you a bit hard on the chap?’

‘He’s too big for his boots,’ said Grice. ‘And now I suppose you’re going to tell me that you didn’t know where Drayton was?’

‘I did not,’ said Rollison.

Jolly came in with coffee, and Rollison told the story as he knew it. Grice agreed that there was little hope the body would prove to be that of someone other than Drayton, but the full medical report would not be available for several days. Meanwhile, had Susan Lancaster told him anything? Rollison countered quickly: ‘What did Horniman tell the police at Bournemouth?’

It transpired that Horniman’s story had been the same as Susan’s. And, as Drayton himself was not actually wanted by the police, there had been no action that the police could take. As

far as the previous night's events were concerned, Horniman said that he had not known that Drayton lived in the New Forest but had gone to meet him by appointment at the Crown, in Lyndhurst. Drayton had telephoned him, but had not turned up, so Horniman had returned to the Lorne Hall Hotel. There was nothing that could be proved untrue in that story.

'Or is there?' asked Grice.

Rollison frowned. 'I don't know. Personally I think he went to the cottage, had a shock when he saw it ablaze, and made off, waiting for a while at Lyndhurst so as to have a plausible story to tell you. I also think that it was Horniman who was fired at on the train,' he added.

'And why do you think that?'

Rollison told him, and then agreed with Grice that it was just possible that someone had been playing the fool with a gun on the bridge. Cartridge cases had been found on the roadway and the police were still searching for the gun. Grice was reluctant to connect that episode with the other mystery and, as there was no reliable evidence, Rollison did not press the point.

When the Superintendent had gone, Jolly came into the room, ostensibly to collect the coffee cups, actually in the hope that Rollison would tell him what had been said.

'How is the Superintendent, sir?'

Rollison smiled. 'How much did you hear?'

'Very little, sir.'

'I wonder,' said Rollison, dryly.

He had already discussed the Bournemouth trip with Jolly and now, half to take Jolly's mind off the disagreeable prospect of a secretary, half because he really wanted to know, he asked his opinion.

'Well, sir, two things appear quite obvious to me, and I have no doubt that you have seen them. I think Mr Grice has, too, sir, but prefers not to admit it.'

'Go on,' said Rollison.

'Briefly this, sir. Horniman knew the district where Mr Drayton was hiding. He told Miss Susan. He also, it appears, told Mrs Drayton, and both went down to see Mr Bruce. But an attempt was made on Horniman's life while he was on board the train—'

'Why do you say that?' asked Rollison.

Jolly looked mildly surprised.

'Surely, sir, we can conclude that, from the conversation which Horniman had with the man at Southampton.'

'Right,' said Rollison.

'And then, sir, Horniman went off in a hurry to see Mr Bruce, saw what had happened, and hurried away. It seems to me that whoever fired the cottage might also have engineered the attack on Horniman.'

'It's possible,' said Rollison, 'and it seems to answer most questions.'

'Do the police know Mrs Drayton, sir?'

'No. They thought she was still in America.'

'I wonder if she *was* Mr Bruce's mother,' murmured Jolly, 'or whether it was an attempt to make Miss Susan think she was. After all, sir, Miss Susan is wealthy, is she not?'

Rollison nodded absently.

'And this may conceivably be an attempt to defraud her,' said Jolly.

Rollison said slowly: 'It could be, I suppose; but I'm backing *Silva-Sheen* and the new invention.'

'Only time will tell, sir,' said Jolly blandly. He glanced at the correspondence, 'I hope you will allow me to assist further with that, sir? Er … if I may say so, I *have* wondered whether, at such a stage, you would not find it more distracting to initiate a secretary than to manage with my help. If I may suggest delaying those letters for a few days, until it is reasonably certain that you will not have to leave in a hurry, sir, I think—I am only making a suggestion, sir—' he broke off.

In the end, Rollison agreed to the delay.

Little developed in the next week. Grice could not trace the gun with which the shots had been fired, nor could he find the round-shouldered man, although Horniman had given him a Fulham address, said that his name was Welling, and that he often carried out small errands for him. According to the Colonel he had brought a message to Southampton about the meeting with Bruce Drayton at Lyndhurst. Horniman was clearly trying to establish that Welling had been the link with Bruce Drayton, and also stress the point that Bruce had disappeared of his own free will.

The medical evidence on the body was inconclusive. Dental

evidence suggested only that it might be Bruce's. At the final inquest, however, it was formally declared that the body was Bruce's, and that death was by burning; otherwise it was an open verdict, which covered suicide, murder or accident.

Rollison did not think there was much doubt about which it was, and believed the police were also convinced that it had been murder.

Horniman gave no sign that he was worried, and saw much of Susan. For a few days she had been subdued, then she had brightened up under Horniman's influence. Gossip raged; but Rollison was less worried by gossip about her than the possibility that the police held the same opinion as he: that Horniman had convinced her that Bruce was alive.

The police would doubtless have taken prompt steps but for the open verdict, which tied their hands. There was no crime with which to accuse Horniman or Susan, only the possibility of crime. It was being cleverly done, thought Rollison; Horniman was keeping just inside the law.

One fact had emerged: Bruce Drayton's contract with the Board of Trade had expired, and that being so he had every right to work for private concerns. One might guess that Horniman was employing him, or that a syndicate of textile manufacturers were behind him; but it was only guesswork. Rollison would have liked to spend more time watching Horniman and Susan, but the desk claimed him.

One bright October morning, when his mail was more than usually excessive, he decided once and for all to engage a secretary. He had scarcely put the matter in hand when the telephone rang.

He lifted the receiver.

It was Superintendent Grice, an exceedingly worried man.

'Rolly, do you know where Susan Lancaster is?' he demanded abruptly.

Rollison stiffened. 'At her flat, presumably.'

'She's not, she seems to have disappeared. And the flat's been ransacked. Rolly, don't act the fool over this business. Meredith's been playing merry hell about interfering outsiders, and Barrow's managed to get his ear. Do you or don't you know where she is?'

'I can't even guess,' said Rollison, 'not even for the Chief

Constable. Why not try Horniman?’

Chapter Four

Seaside Revels

Susan had reached her Mayfair flat at half-past two that morning. Tired after a party, she had gone to bed at once, so her maid declared. But before eight o'clock she had left again, taking no luggage. 'Disappeared' seemed too strong a word, Rollison thought, although later in the day he began to feel real disquiet. The maid, to whom he talked, told him that she herself had been up at eight o'clock, but had not called Miss Lancaster, since she had been to bed so late the night before. At eleven o'clock, however, a registered letter had been delivered, marked *Immediate and Urgent.* The maid had taken it into the bedroom, and found Miss Lancaster gone. The room had been in disorder, and, alarmed, the maid had telephoned Scotland Yard.

The police now had the letter; they were by no means sure that the 'disorder' was anything more than untidiness. But it gave them a chance to probe, which was what they most wanted.

Grice telephoned to Rollison late in the afternoon, to tell him that there was still no clue as to Susan's whereabouts. Horniman had been interviewed and declared that he knew nothing. And: 'He threw his weight about rather, Rolly.'

'He's that kind of man,' said Rollison.

'I wondered if you would go and see him, as a friend of Miss Lancaster's,' Grice said, mildly. 'I'd very much like to have your considered opinion of him.'

'But he'll only throw his weight at me,' reproached Rollison.

'That won't do you any harm,' Grice said. 'Did the maid tell you about a registered letter?'

'Yes. What was in it?'

'We haven't opened it' protested Grice, scandalised. 'She hasn't been gone long enough for as to assume that she is missing, you know. She may get in touch with the maid before long. I'm sending the letter back to the flat, to be posted on to

her if she does that. We've tried it for prints, of course.'

'I see,' said Rollison. 'All right, I'll go.'

The Colonel lived in a block of Park Lane apartments overlooking Hyde Park. The building was sumptuous, the atmosphere exclusive. A bell-boy took Rollison up to Horniman's flat and left him. He rang the bell three times before it was answered by a meek-looking middle-aged woman.

Before Rollison could say anything, an irritable voice called: 'Who is it?' and Horniman appeared, looking harassed and annoyed. The sight of Rollison seemed to anger him still further. 'If you want me, I'm *not* in,' he declared. 'I'm expecting a taxi at six o'clock sharp.'

The woman scurried away, leaving Rollison still standing at the door. Horniman said sharply: 'I've told you, I've no time to spare.'

'Not even five minutes?' asked Rollison, mildly. 'I wouldn't worry you, but Susan Lancaster—'

'Damn you and the police and your confounded curiosity!' snapped Horniman. 'Can't a girl go away for a few days without being hounded by policemen and interfering amateurs? Where Miss Lancaster has gone is her business. And now if you'll excuse me—'

He pushed the door to with a little snap that sounded very definite indeed.

Rollison turned away, reflecting that Colonel Horniman was obviously badly rattled.

It might be worth trying to find out where exactly he was going.

Rollison hurried downstairs and from a telephone booth in the hall, telephoned Jolly.

'The Hon. Mr Rollison's residence,' greeted Jolly blandly.

'Jolly, you're going on holiday,' said Rollison. 'I don't know for how long, but pack what you need for two or three nights and come to the entrance of Park Court, Park Lane, without losing any time. You mustn't be later than five to six.'

Jolly received these instructions as calmly as he would have accepted an order to go to the North Pole or post a letter, and at five minutes to six precisely descended from a taxi in Park Lane, carrying a small suitcase and a furled umbrella. Rollison spoke to the taxi driver, who was readily, if expensively, persuaded to

drive a little way along and there wait for Jolly. Rollison told his man briefly what he wanted: to know where Horniman was going and whether he met Susan.

At six o'clock a taxi drew up outside the main entrance to Park Court, at one minute past Horniman stepped into it and soon he was travelling towards Hyde Park Corner. Jolly's taxi turned after him. Immediately afterwards, Rollison saw Barrow drive past.

Rollison went back to his flat and telephoned Grice, who was excessive in his thanks.

'You'll let me know when you hear from Jolly, won't you?' he asked.

'Isn't Barrow going to do that?' asked Rollison, innocently, and rang off.

The attitude of the police puzzled him; Grice had always been friendly, but had seldom gone out of his way to enlist help in such a matter as this.

It was a little after eleven o'clock when Jolly telephoned to Rollison at his flat. He was in Bournemouth, and Horniman had gone straight to the Lorne Hall Hotel. Susan Lancaster was not registered there, but Horniman had asked for a Mrs Drayton.

'Mrs Drayton', apparently, had arrived late that afternoon.

Horniman had gone up to his room which was next to Mrs Drayton's. Unfortunately he, Jolly, had been unable to get a room on the same floor but he had secured one immediately above Colonel Horniman's. Moreover, he had come to an arrangement with a helpful chamber-maid and hoped that he would be able to report some progress next morning. Did Mr Rollison intend to come to Bournemouth? 'I took the precaution of reserving a room at the Norfolk Hotel,' Jolly said. 'Perhaps you will let me know tomorrow if I am to cancel the reservation.'

'I will,' promised Rollison. 'Oh, and keep a look-out for Sergeant Barrow.'

'That shall be done, sir,' Jolly assured him, and added: 'You will remember your engagements tomorrow morning, sir, won't you?'

'Yes,' said Rollison, absently. 'Yes, of course. Good night.'

Just before he went to bed, he wondered what engagements Jolly meant. He looked up his engagement book and found that

he had none noted for the next morning. The journey and the excitement had perhaps made Jolly confuse the date.

Rollison stopped thinking about it.

In the morning, he decided to breakfast off toast and marmalade, and to lunch early. While he was shaving he thought again of 'Mrs Drayton'. Of all the odd turns in an odd business, that surprised him most. This time the police would surely get her real address.

At ten o'clock, there was a ring at the front-door bell.

Rollison, looking through his correspondence that was almost as heavy as that of the previous day, and feeling rueful because there had been another hitch over his secretarial arrangements, half-expected to see Grice on the threshold. Instead, a tall young man with an eager expression stood there. 'Good *morning,* sir.'

'Good morning,' returned Rollison, politely.

The young man stared at him for a moment and then said nervously:

'It *is* ten o'clock, isn't it?'

Gravely, Rollison consulted his watch. 'One minute past,' he said.

'Then I am on time,' declared the young man.

'Oh,' said Rollison. 'On time for what?'

The young man thrust his hand into his pocket and brought forth a letter. He read it hurriedly, then looked above Rollison's head to the flat number, which was on the fan-light. 'This is 25a Gresham Terrace, isn't it?' he asked. 'I am speaking to Mr Rollison?'

An echo of Jolly's reminder entered Rollison's mind. 'Don't forget your engagements.' He held out his hand for the letter as another man came up the stairs. This one, though equally breathless, was plump.

Rollison's fears were confirmed. Jolly had made an appointment for an interview with the tall young man for ten o'clock. and with the plump young man, presumably, at 10.15, and goodness knew for how many others. A vista of an interminable series of appointments with earnest young applicants; both tall and plump, appeared in Rollison's mind. He did not like it. He had not intended to do all the sifting himself, and now, faced with it, his enthusiasm for a secretary wilted.

He gritted his teeth, and marshalled the two young men into

the flat.

Had Jolly made a note of the appointments? He searched among the files, and found a list; he groaned. Every fifteen minutes from now until 12.45 he was to interview earnest, hopeful, eager young men.

The tall one was, apparently, James B. Hadlam. He was very earnest indeed. He produced many credentials. He assured Rollison of his desire to render the utmost service. Rollison promised to write to him and paid his travelling expenses.

The bell rang again while he was interviewing the plump young man, in whom earnestness had been replaced with plaintiveness. Rollison leapt up and rushed to the door. There stood a stocky, pugnacious-looking man of between twenty-five and thirty. He was untidy and snub-nosed, but Rollison saw with a surge of relief that he was neither plaintive nor earnest. He liked the look of the newcomer; nevertheless, in all fairness he must interview the rest of the applicants.

'Stay on duty for a bit, will you,' he suggested, 'and send the others in one by one.'

It was a miserable morning. At half-past twelve, the applicant due at 12.45 appeared and was shown in immediately. Ten minutes afterwards he was shown out. 'Thank God that's the last,' Rollison said in exhausted relief. 'It is, isn't it?'

The snub-nosed young man nodded.

'What you want is a cup of coffee,' he said cheerfully. 'I've got the milk on.' Casually he went into the kitchen, which was sacred to Jolly and where Rollison was only permitted to go if such a visit were unavoidable. He came back with a tray, biscuits, and one cup.

'Two cups,' said Rollison.

'That's all right, I've had mine.'

Rollison looked at him for a moment and then burst out laughing. 'What's your name?'

'Higginbottom.'

'Sure you're not making it up?'

The young man shook his head. 'Quite sure,' he said cheerfully. 'If I were, it would probably be French with a small f or Reginal Argincourt, or even—'

'Come and sit down,' said Rollison. 'I see you're a man of imagination with the will to keep it under restraint. Do have a

cigarette.'

'Thanks. Would you mind if I smoke a pipe? Odour inoffensive, I assure you.'

'Carry on,' said Rollison, gravely.

'Thanks very much.' Higginbottom took out pipe and pouch and began filling the pipe. 'You do want an amanuensis, don't you?' He looked at the piles of unanswered letters. 'All crime?' he asked.

'Very little crime,' answered Rollison.

'Just as well,' said Higginbottom. 'One can get sated with it. I wanted to join the Police Force,' he added, with a grin, 'but I'm half an inch too short. No exaggerated notions,' he added, quickly, 'I didn't expect to be drafted through Hendon College to a desk of my own in three months, or anything like that. Perfectly prepared to be a copper. I thought – well, I *did* think, so why shouldn't I say so? – I thought when I saw your letter that you *might* find me useful now and again. I'm a peaceable chap but I can use my mits if there's any need.'

The telephone bell rang. Rollison stretched out his hand for the receiver, then said thoughtfully: 'There's an extension in the hall. Listen-in to the conversation and take it down, will you, then come back and transcribe it.'

'Right-ho' agreed Higginbottom.

'Morning, Jolly,' said Rollison, brightly. 'How are things?'

'Good morning, sir.' Jolly paused. 'Matters are reasonably satisfactory, sir. Two of the people in whom we are interested are here, including Mrs Drayton.'

'What do you make of her?' asked Rollison.

'I had time to observe her only for a few minutes, when she came downstairs for coffee,' Jolly said. 'She is having lunch in her room, sir. She was with the Colonel. She is a well-preserved, well-dressed, rather attractive-looking woman, sir, that is really all I can say,'

'And Miss Lancaster?'

'She isn't staying here, sir, but I understand Colonel Horniman is lunching at the Norfolk, and I may have something to report after lunch. Will you postpone any decision about your own movements, sir, until I have telephoned you again?'

'Right. I'll do that.'

'Very good, sir. And may I inquire how the appointments

transpired this morning?'

'Oh, they went off all right,' Rollison said. 'What's your estimate of the required qualifications, Jolly?'

Jolly gave a solemn, meticulous list of the talents and attainments he considered necessary. It went on for a long time.

At the end of it Rollison gave a snort of laughter.

'You want quite a paragon,' he murmured.

'If I may say so, sir, *you* do.'

'I see,' said Rollison. 'I—look here, are any more coming this afternoon?'

'Six, sir, between two-thirty and three-forty-five.'

'Hmm. Well I'll stay in until half-past four, but I might go out after that.'

'I will try to ring you before then, sir. Goodbye.'

Rollison rang off, as Higginbottom came in, pencil and paper in hand, a rueful grin on his face.

'I'd better not waste any more of your time,' he said.

'Frightened by Jolly?'

'Utterly,' admitted Higginbottom.

'Well, try getting those notes back,' said Rollison. He grinned to himself. Higginbottom had almost made him forget the disappearance of Susan. If she did not meet Horniman for lunch, or if the police did not know where she was by the afternoon, the word 'disappearance' would have a fuller meaning. He telephoned Grice, but the Superintendent was out. He frowned at the ceiling, wondered what was wrong with him, and realised that he was feeling hungry. So, probably, was Higginbottom. He glanced towards the young man, who appeared to be typing for dear life.

'Let me see what you have been doing.' Rollison looked through the pages with a cursory interest, for he had already decided.

'You'll do,' he said, 'and Jolly's told you everything you need to know. If he hasn't, he will' He reflected for a moment. 'I find Jolly hard to please,' he said, gravely, 'and extremely sensitive over the kitchen.'

'Advice to be treasured,' said Higginbottom, gratefully. 'When shall I start?'

'You've started already,' Rollison told him. 'This afternoon you will break the news to the other six applicants, pay their

expenses and take letters.' He heaved a sigh of relief. 'Now you'd better come and have some lunch with me.'

It was arranged, during luncheon, that Higginbottom should try to rent two rooms nearby, rooms which Rollison knew were vacant. If successful, Higginbottom would use one as an office and the other as a bed-sitting-room.

At four o'clock, Rollison finished dictating and decided that he would go out to tea.

The telephone rang as he was about to leave.

'Yes, Jolly,' he said.

'Miss Susan is here, sir,' Jolly's voice boomed sedately over the wire. 'She is at this moment having tea with Horniman and Mrs Drayton, at Bobby's Restaurant. There is a train from Waterloo at 5.30, sir, but the best train is the 6.30.'

'I'll catch that,' promised Rollison.

'Have you been successful with the applicants?' asked Jolly in a tone which suggested that he hoped very much that Rollison had failed.

'Yes,' said Rollison, and grinned. 'A man named Higginbottom, but don't worry, he answers very happily to Snub.' He rang off.

Chapter Five

Rollison Changes Rooms

Horniman and Susan seemed quite content.

Barrow went to see Susan and later confided in Rollison that she had scoffed at the very idea of ‘disappearing’. She had every right to go where she wanted; she had said fiercely. Nor had she seemed worried when told her flat had apparently been searched. Barrow also saw ‘Mrs Drayton’, but learned nothing new from her.

After two days, Mrs Drayton returned to London and Barrow went on the same train. Susan and Horniman showed no sign of leaving. There was one remarkable feature about their second visit to Bournemouth. They lunched or dined every day with different couples. What they talked about Rollison did not know.

On the Sunday evening Rollison strolled into the dining-room of the Norfolk. The friendly head-waiter espied him and came across the room.

‘Is the Colonel dining here again?’ asked Rollison.

‘He’s reserved his usual table for four, sir.’

‘Find me a quiet corner, will you?’ asked Rollison; and he was promptly led to a window-seat.

A loud-voiced, hearty woman with a limp-looking man came in with Horniman and Susan. The woman was good-looking in a coarse way, and appeared to be very pleased with life. So, too, did Horniman, who ordered champagne.

Horniman leaned forward, covered Susan’s hand with his own, and said something to the hearty woman, who immediately cried out: ‘That’s wonderful, Horny, wonderful! Congratulations!’

So it was an engagement; nothing had warned Rollison of such a development; had Susan lost her head?

‘I do hope you will be happy, my dear, but you’re bound to be with such a husband. Wonderful! George, fill our glasses!’ The

limp-looking man obeyed, but Rollison was interested chiefly in Susan. For she was looking at Horniman with an expression of acute dislike. It was gone in a flash and the others did not appear to have noticed it, but Rollison was sure he was not mistaken. Why, then, had she agreed to an engagement if she did not want to?

Twice in the next ten minutes, while the others were chattering and the rest of the diners were looking with tolerant amusement towards the table, Susan glanced towards Rollison, and this time her glance seemed to hold an appeal.

Dinner over, the party surged into the hall. Rollison heard the hearty woman's voice booming through the foyer: 'Then that's settled, Horny, good! Oh, and *every* happiness, Susan, every happiness!' She pecked at Susan's cheek. Horniman waved casually to the departing taxi, then turned to Susan. 'I'll get my coat.'

He went towards the cloak-room while Rollison waited near the reception desk, hoping that Susan would come over. Never had a girl who had just become engaged looked so unhappy.

Had the body in the burnt out cottage *really* been Bruce's?

Rollison, seeing that there was little hope that she would talk freely just then, decided to go back to the Lorne Hall Hotel. He badly wanted to find out what would pass between Susan and Horniman that evening; for the first time since he had come to Bournemouth, the tempo of the affair had quickened.

None of the hotel staff saw him go up the stairs. He knew that Susan had taken Mrs Drayton's room, and that near the end of the passage from which the rooms led, was a linen cupboard. He waited until he heard Horniman's voice on the stairs, then slipped inside the cupboard.

Horniman was saying: 'You must be sensible, Susan, I wouldn't have done that unless—'

'You had no right to do it!'

'But my dear, it was always understood—'

'You should have consulted me first. It—it's unforgiveable. And to *her,* of all people! It will be in every newspaper tomorrow, everyone will think that I—oh, how I wish I'd never listened to you. I wish I'd *demanded* proof that he's—'

'Be quiet!' A different note had crept into Horniman's voice, a hint of menace which Rollison noticed but which Susan was too

angry to observe.

They were standing outside Susan's door, and Rollison could just see her face and the back of Horniman's head.

'I won't be quiet. I don't even know that he *is* alive. I've done exactly what you've told me, my friends think I'm a heartless beast, they—but it doesn't matter what they think so long as he is alive. But *is* he? You've promised to prove it, you've told me that he'll see me here, instead you've made me meet a lot of foul people who aren't worth a moment's thought. Even his mother—'

'Susan,' said Horniman in a tense voice, 'I won't have you talking to me like this.'

Susan said: 'You haven't bought me!'

'You mustn't talk so freely up here, someone might hear you. I have explained the difficulty, and—'

'You haven't satisfied *me!* You've gone too far. I'm going back to town first thing in the morning.'

'You will do nothing of the kind!'

'Won't I?' asked Susan, in a taut voice. 'We'll see.'

She turned away abruptly, and opened her door. Horniman put out a hand to stop her. She wrenched herself free and hurried into the room, shutting the door in his face.

Rollison heard the key turn in the lock. He also noticed Horniman's expression. There was something malignant about it, in the set of his thin lips. Abruptly, he went into his own room.

Rollison stepped into the passage. No one was about. He went up to Horniman's door, and heard the *ting*! of the telephone bell.

'Get me Boscombe 01534,' said Horniman, and he appeared to be tapping his foot impatiently as he waited. Then: 'Mrs Lenwell, please … Hallo, Jane …' 'Jane' was the hearty woman; Rollison was glad to learn her other name.

'Jane, you must get that story out tonight,' Horniman went on. 'Yes, all the papers you can, use what influence you've got … She's being difficult, but I'll handle her.' There was a long pause, and then Horniman snapped: 'I said I would handle her.'

Rollison thought: 'He'd have a shock if I went in now,' but as the notion entered his head a maid came along the passage carrying a pile of linen. With as much nonchalance as he could

muster Rollison walked towards the stairs.

He waited in the hall for a few minutes, and presently Horniman came downstairs, wearing a light coat. The Colonel hurried into the street and hailed a taxi. Rollison followed and was near enough to overhear the direction given.

'Take me to Christchurch, the Old Barn,'

Rollison approached another taxi driver. 'Do you know the Old Barn, Christchurch?' he inquired.

The man grinned. 'Who doesn't! Cosy little spot, sir.'

'I would like to get there in a hurry,' murmured Rollison.

The man jerked his head towards the disappearing taxi.

'Before him?'

'You've got it exactly.'

'Okay. Hop in.'

The run took a little more than twenty minutes.

'Want me to wait?' the driver asked.

'Yes, please.'

'Tell you what,' said the driver, tentatively. I know the chap who's driving him. Name of Joe. I'll have a word with him if you like. Might save you waiting about.'

'An excellent idea,' said Rollison heartily, and a note changed hands.

The Old Barn was a restaurant of some character, and appeared to be exceedingly popular. Rollison went to a quiet corner where he was moderately sure he would not be easily spotted.

Horniman came in five minutes later.

Immediately, a little man with round shoulders, whom Rollison at once recognised, sidled across the room from a table where he had been sitting alone. Horniman said something which Rollison did not catch, and they went out together. Rollison hurried after them, but he was only in time to see the red light of the taxi disappearing in the direction of the New Forest.

His cabby loomed out of the darkness.

'I've fixed it,' he said. 'Joe'll let me know and I'll let you know, sir. Okay?'

'Excellent,' said Rollison pleasantly.

'Of course, if you'd *rather* follow him—'

'No,' said Rollison. 'Back to the Lorne Hall Hotel, I think.'

He got in beside the driver, who, under the impression that Rollison was a detective, recounted various improbable examples of his own sagacity in that direction. To all of which Rollison replied amiably. Horniman would be away for some time, he was thinking, and all he, Rollison, needed was ten minutes in his room.

'Any time I can do anything else for you, sir,' said the driver, 'it will be a pleasure.'

'If a job's going, it's yours,' promised Rollison, and waited until the man drove off.

Then he sauntered into the hotel, sat in the lounge for ten minutes, then, with a stifled yawn, left the lounge for the first floor. None of the staff noticed him. He reached Susan's door, and wondered whether he might, after all, try to see her, but decided that she was in too emotional a mood to tackle. He went on to Horniman's door.

He took a knife from his pocket.

Two minutes later, he opened the door and went inside. As he closed it, he heard footsteps along the passage.

He waited until they had passed, then bolted the door and put on the lights.

Horniman's room was neat, too neat for Rollison's liking. His clothes were on hangers in the wardrobe, the waste-paper basket was empty. Rollison stood for a moment, considering where to start looking, and then he noticed an attaché case by the side of the dressing-table. It was locked, but the fastenings were not good, and, using the knife, he forced them open.

Within was a writing case, all partitions crammed with papers. Horniman's neatness might prove helpful after all. He found the prospectus for a new fabric company, other prospectuses of smaller concerns. There were a few bills and receipts, but no private correspondence.

Then Rollison found an envelope bearing an East London postmark. It was torn at the edges, as if Horniman had ripped it open in his anxiety to read the contents.

Rollison took out a single slip of paper.

There was no address, and only two words: *'Be careful'*. Beneath them, placed horizontally, was a rubber-stamped impression of a claw-headed hammer. Rollison stood staring at it. Somewhere before he had seen that impression, but he could

not remember where.

Then he heard footsteps, and a woman's voice. At first he did not hear what she was saying, but one word attracted his attention. 'Suspicious,' she said, 'it looked suspicious to *me*.'

The footsteps stopped, and someone tried the handle of the door. Then a man asked: 'Are you there. Colonel Horniman?'

Rollison's heart began to race. The handle rattled again. Rollison darted a glance towards the wardrobe, but it was no use as a hiding place. He grunted, as if waking from sleep, and the man called out again.

'Eh?' muttered Rollison. 'Eh? What's that?'

'Is that you. Colonel Horniman?'

'Of course it is. Who else?' grunted Rollison irritably. 'What the devil's the matter? I was asleep.'

'I'm sorry, sir, but the maid said she thought you had gone out, and there was a light in your room.'

'Tell her to mind her own damn' business,' growled Rollison. Would it work? Or were the suspicions deep enough for the man to insist on coming in? There was a moment of indecision. Then the man said: 'I see, sir. I'm sorry to have disturbed you.'

Rollison drew a deep breath of relief, but his nerve was shaken.

He had been in the room for a quarter of an hour, and Horniman might soon be back at any moment. He had not learnt very much, but there were the prospectuses, a useful hint as to the way Horniman's mind was working, and there was that cryptic, warning note. *'Be careful.'* Then the hammer impression …

Rollison peered into the passage, made sure it was empty, and slipped out, leaving the door ajar, so that no one could hear it close. Not until he was at the head of the stairs did he feel easy.

It was at that moment that he remembered where he had seen the hammer impression before.

There had been talk of a leader of a smash-and-grab gang operating from the East End of London, who was known as the Hammer. Rollison had seen the story in one of the sensational Sunday newspapers. Now he put the whole thing out of his mind for the time being and scribbled a note to Susan. *'I must see you downstairs, in twenty minutes – that is, at five past ten.'*

He amused himself – and he hoped it might amuse Susan – by

adding a top hat, a monocle and a swagger cane. These had been the insignia of the Toff, in those days when he had roamed the East End of London in quest of excitement.

He found a porter, and asked the man to deliver the note immediately. Then he hurried to the station yard. He found his taxi driver easily enough.

'Is Joe back?' he inquired eagerly.

'Not yet,' the man answered. 'I haven't—but this looks like him,' he added, as a taxi pulled into the yard.

It was Joe's cab all right, and Joe was ruffled. He had taken a dislike to his passenger, and to the little man who had been with him. No, he hadn't heard much of their conversation, but when the little man had been dropped at the Lansdowne, the stiffshirt had said: 'Don't forget, it must be tonight, and make a job of it. If there's trouble, come into my room.'

Rollison's mouth set in a hard line. He paid Joe well, and walked back to the Lorne Hall Hotel. The words were clear enough to him. The little man was to visit Susan's room; and Horniman had said: 'I'll handle her.' Rollison recalled the expression on the man's face; and he was in no two minds about Susan's danger.

She entered the hall exactly at five minutes past ten.

Rollison took her arm and led her outside. Nowhere within walls could be counted safe from Horniman's overhearing.

'What is it?' she asked, listlessly.

'Susan,' said Rollison. 'I want you to forget that we've not seen eye to eye lately, and to believe that I mean what I say. I am afraid that you are in imminent danger. I want you to go upstairs, collect your things and go to the Norfolk Hotel, using my room. I will stay in yours.'

'What an absurd idea!'

'Not really,' said Rollison. 'You're planning to leave in the morning. It doesn't matter whether you leave from my hotel or yours.'

After a long pause, she said: 'I don't understand you.'

'Heaven send me patience,' said Rollison sharply. 'You must just take it from me that I wouldn't tell you that I thought you were in danger for a joke, or just to get you out of here. You're risking nothing by doing what I ask. You don't have to put up with my company, and you won't have to keep on the alert in

case Horniman tries to plead his case.' After a pause, he added: 'I am serious, Susan, never more so.'

'But it doesn't make sense.'

'Nor do a great many things that have been happening lately.'

There was another pause, and then she said: 'All right, I'll change hotels with you.'

Rollison took his key out of his pocket. 'Here you are,' he said. 'I'll send for my things later. They only want putting into a case.'

'You'd better collect them first,' Susan objected, but without much heart. Undoubtedly something had frightened her that night, and Rollison thought he knew what it was. She had been convinced that Bruce Drayton was alive; now she was not sure.

Thinking it best to let her go back to the hotel alone he watched her out of sight, and then went to a public call-box and rang up Horniman.

He was not pleased to learn that his caller was Rollison.

His voice rose to a tone of bluster. 'I told you once before not to meddle in my business, Rollison.'

'The word "meddle" is open to quite a variety of interpretations,' said Rollison cheerfully. 'But I didn't ring you up to argue the niceties of conversation.'

Rollison was enjoying himself. Just so long as he could keep Horniman on the line, Susan would be safe.

'Well, why did you ring me up?' Horniman growled. 'Mainly because if I had called on you,' Rollison went on blandly, 'I *might* have been charged with manslaughter.'

'What—' began Horniman, and then broke off.

'Had we talked I might have lost my temper with you,' Rollison said. 'I was at the Norfolk, and heard—'

'If you think I don't know you've been watching me all the week, you're mistaken,' snapped Horniman, 'but *I'm* not worried by you, Rollison. I won't be pestered and I won't have Susan pestered. If you don't stop following us, I shall report the matter to the police. I've been able to help Susan to get over the shock of Drayton's death. If she cares to marry me, that's her business and not yours. Leave Susan alone.'

Rollison rang off, smiling. If Susan had lost no time, she would now be ready to leave her room.

She appeared at the foot of the stairs, carrying only a small

case. Rollison joined her.

'I've left my other things upstairs,' she said, 'will you arrange for them to go to the station for me in the morning? I'm catching the 10.12.'

'I'll see to it.' Rollison took her bag, and they went out. A bus drew up as they reached the main road. Soon they were entering the Norfolk. Rollison took Susan upstairs and, five minutes afterwards, had packed all he wanted for the night in a small case. Susan stood by the dressing-table, watching him. He thought that she would talk freely enough the next day; just now she was too worked up, too uncertain of herself, to want him to stay. He smiled at her.

'Good night, Susan,' he said, 'you can sleep soundly.'

'Good night,' she said. 'And—thanks.'

He hurried out.

Twenty minutes later he let himself silently into Susan's room at the Lorne Hall Hotel. The bed was turned down, and Susan's other suitcase was on the luggage stool. It had Horniman's initials on it. So he had lent her a case and presumably she had brought some clothes, though none had been missed from her flat.

It was then a little past eleven.

He undressed and got into bed. An hour's sleep would be invaluable. It was a little before half-past twelve when he woke. The hotel was silent, and it was very dark. He stretched out his hand for a cigarette, then decided that he would not be wise to smoke. He pondered over the evening's events slowly, testing each one. Always coming to the conclusion that the most important things he had seen and heard were Horniman's expression outside Susan's door and his 'I'll handle her.' But was there any sound reason for thinking, as he had done, that there might be an attempt to *murder* Susan? Here, in the darkness, without a sound to disturb him, it seemed a remote possibility.

A clock struck one.

He hitched himself up on his pillows. If he were right, the attack would be during darkness. Dawn would break soon after six o'clock, and it was reasonable to suppose that the attack would take place between one and, say, five o'clock, so he might have a four-hour vigil.

He decided that he could risk one cigarette.

When it was finished, he wanted another, but resisted the temptation. Half-past one struck, then two o'clock. The darkness and silence were making it difficult to keep his eyes open. He longed to turn over and go to sleep. His imagination had cheated him this time, he should know better than to give way to such impulses.

What was that?

He stiffened, and stared towards the door. He had heard no footsteps, no warning note, only a faint, scratching sound, such as a key might make. He eased himself down in bed, still staring towards the door, where a faint line of light showed at the bottom. The scraping noise continued; he knew that someone was forcing the lock, using a skeleton key or some equally felonious tool.

A streak of light cut the darkness. The shadow of a man's head and shoulder appeared. Rollison half-closed his eyes, but kept a lookout through his lashes to see what was happening. It seemed a long time before the door opened more widely. He tensed himself in readiness to make a sudden spring from the bed.

Then, from the passage, came a woman's scream, sharp and clear

One moment there was the hushed silence, next the scream.

Chapter Six

Rollison Buys A Book

Rollison was out of bed in a trice, but the darkness hindered him. He fumbled for the light, switched it on and pulled the door open. He heard the sound of footsteps running along the passage. The woman screamed again.

One of the maids appeared to have fallen, or been thrown, to the floor. Rollison could just see the heels of the intruder rushing down the stairs. A door opened and a man in pyjamas cried out: 'What the devil's all this?'

'Stop him!' screeched the maid.

Other doors were opening by now, and people were calling out across the passage. Reaching the hall, Rollison saw the intruder trying to side-step the night-porter, who was brandishing a chair.

'Throw it at him!' shouted Rollison.

The intruder reached the door, Rollison a yard or two behind him. Rollison thought it was Welling, but could not be sure, for once in the street the man jumped into a small car, and was off in a flash.

'He—he's got away!' gasped the porter,

'Not our lucky night,' said Rollison, regretfully. But he was cheered at the thought that Susan at least was safe.

The manager of the Lorne Hall Hotel had sent for the police and persuaded the guests to go back to their rooms. An alert inspector arrived, and asked innumerable questions. He appeared to be satisfied with Rollison's answers. It seemed clear that Welling – if it was Welling – had come to murder Susan. It seemed equally clear that Horniman had decided on drastic measures to quell her revolt; but it was impossible to prove that Horniman was behind the attack.

The only real harm was a cut in the maid's cheek, caused by the knife which the assailant had been carrying.

The inspector went off, promising to make sure that Susan's room at the Norfolk was watched, and Rollison went back to bed.

He was up before nine o'clock, made arrangements for his luggage and Susan's to be collected, and strolled to the West Station at ten minutes to ten.

The booking hall was deserted except for two ticket collectors, one of them counting tickets, the other chalking times of trains on a small blackboard.

Soon after ten o'clock, however, people began to stream on to the platform. Rollison stood by the bookstall, watching the doorway.

At ten minutes past ten Susan arrived.

A porter was carrying her cases; just behind him came Horniman.

Rollison backed into the bookstall, where he could see them without being seen. He heard Horniman say: 'Susan, my dear, you must listen to me.'

Susan ignored him and followed her porter along the platform. Horniman paused, uncertain what to do, then he, too, turned to the bookstall.

Rollison slipped out one way while the Colonel entered by the other.

Horniman halted by a stand displaying a colourful selection of paper-backed books. Over their covers, in which he appeared to be absorbed, he watched the platform. Susan had disappeared, and her porter was coming back.

Rollison wondered if he, Horniman, intended travelling on that train or whether he only wanted to make sure that Susan was on it.

It was possible that someone else, perhaps the man who had used the knife, might be here. Rollison watched in vain for any glance of recognition between Horniman and those who passed him. Yet Horniman, still pretending to look at the books, was actually casting swift glances right and left, now quite obviously on the look-out for someone.

Was he watching for Rollison?

To test this possibility Rollison strolled quietly past the bookstall.

Horniman's eyes narrowed when he caught sight of him, but

he did not move away. People were hurrying past now; the train was due out in two minutes. Rollison decided that there was nothing to be gained from waiting any longer, and boarded the train several carriages away from Susan. He could join her later.

He could still see Horniman.

Then suddenly, without warning, Horniman swayed. He struck against the stand of books sending them flying. Another convulsive movement and he fell forward, bringing the stand down with a crash.

Every eye turned towards him.

Chapter Seven

Quick Death

The guard's whistle blew.

Rollison opened the door of his carriage and jumped on to the platform, then raced along towards Susan's carriage. He could not leave Bournemouth now, but Susan must not be allowed to travel alone. He reached the door as a porter sped down the platform, shouting: 'Hold it, hold it a minute!' Another whistle blew and green flags waved. Further down the platform, the driver looked out to see the cause of the commotion. Then suddenly the guard's flags seemed to change from green to red.

Rollison relaxed.

He did not see Susan, but hurried towards the bookstall where a crowd of people had gathered. Horniman lay amid scattered books and newspapers.

A man pushed through the silent crowd and went down on his knees by the body. A whisper went from mouth to mouth, muttering: 'A doctor.'

A railway official edged up beside him.

'How is he?'

The doctor glanced up. 'He's dead,' he said, brusquely.

No one spoke. Men and women exchanged glances, one woman gave a hysterical gasp and a man by her side took her arm and led her away. Then, as if a spell had been broken, a dozen people began to talk at once. 'Dead, how dreadful.' 'Poor chap, I thought he looked ill.'

Rollison felt no sympathy for Horniman, but he was shocked by the speed of his death; and the fact of it. It was Susan who had been in danger, yet Horniman who had been killed. For he was pretty sure that this was a case of murder. What did it mean?

A man touched his arm. 'Aren't you Mr Rollison?' he asked.

'Yes, I'm Rollison.'

'I'm Superintendent Carr.'

Rollison smiled, a trifle grimly. ‘You people are so quick. Remarkably so. I feel out-matched.’

Carr gave a short, unmirthful laugh. ‘You gave us enough warning,’ he said. ‘We didn’t expect anything like *this* to happen, though, we were looking after the girl. Did you see what happened?’

‘The collapse. Yes.’

The Superintendent looked round as a railway official came up to him. ‘Ah, Mr Matcham,’ he said, ‘I’m sorry I’ve had to hold the train up, I suppose you’re worried about getting it away.’

‘I don’t want to hold it too long,’ said Matcham. ‘What are you going to do, sir?’

Clearly, Carr had not made up his mind. Rollison could imagine what he was thinking. Someone on that train might be responsible for the death of Horniman. True, there was as yet no evidence that Horniman had been murdered; had there been a shot, or had a knife been used, Carr would not have hesitated to keep the train until every passenger aboard had given his or her name and address. As it was, he was almost certainly asking himself if there were sufficient grounds for further delay.

Rollison murmured: ‘You could see if any of Horniman’s friends are on the train, couldn’t you? There’s Miss Lancaster, for one. There might be others.’

Carr said thoughtfully: ‘You mean the people who lunched and dined with him I suppose. The trouble is, I don’t know them.’

Rollison said diffidently: ‘I don’t want to butt in, but I’ve seen them all.’

Carr’s face cleared. ‘Then that’s all right! I’m sorry, Mr Matcham, but we’ll have to take a quick look at everyone on the train.’

Matcham shrugged his shoulders resignedly. ‘It *would* be my morning on,’ he complained. ‘It’ll take twenty minutes or more, but I’ll get the corridors cleared.’

Instructions were given quickly that all passengers were to take their seats.

‘You might try to stop anyone leaving the station for twenty minutes,’ Rollison suggested, as he and Carr made their way to the train.

‘I did that the moment I heard what had happened,’ said Carr, with a shrug, ‘although anyone could get out by half a dozen different ways if they really wanted to.’

The carriages were no more than half full, and they made good progress. Rollison remembered clearly all those who had dined with Horniman, but he saw no familiar face, excepting Susan’s.

She looked up sharply as they came into her compartment.

Rollison said quietly: ‘I’m sorry, Susan, we can’t travel by this train. Horniman—’

‘Horniman!’ There was a note of astonishment in her voice. ‘I heard that someone had been taken ill and died, surely it’s not —’

‘I’m afraid it is,’ said Rollison.

‘Oh,’ said Susan, blankly. ‘I—’ she broke off, and picked up a small case near her feet. Carr took her larger case off the luggage rack. She made no protest as he helped her out of the carriage. Rollison wished that it were possible to stay with her, but Matcham, in close attendance, was looking pointedly at his watch. They left Susan in charge of a porter, and hurried on their way.

‘We aren’t going to have much luck,’ Carr said, as they reached the end of the train.

‘Well, we tried,’ said Rollison. ‘Three more carriages.’ The first two were quite empty, in the third was one man. He was looking out of the window. Rollison said cheerfully: ‘Why, if it isn’t Mr Lenwell!’

The man started. ‘I don’t think I know you,’ he said doubtfully.

‘We nearly met last night,’ Rollison told him. ‘You were with your wife, Colonel Horniman and—’

‘Well, supposing I was?’ said Lenwell. He looked challengingly from Rollinson to Carr, who, apologetic but firm, said that there were one or two inquiries to be made; he was sorry but he would have to ask Mr Lenwell to catch a later train.

Lenwell’s face lost some of its colour. ‘But I can’t!’ he protested, ‘I’ve an appointment in London at two-fifteen. I *must* travel by this train!’

‘I’m sorry, sir. Colonel Horniman—’

‘Damn Horniman. Who are you?’ He had glanced at Carr’s

card but the name had not, apparently, sunk in.

'I'm sorry, sir.' repeated Carr, 'but Colonel Horniman's death —' *'Death?'*

'I'm afraid so.'

Lenwell did not protest further, but took his suitcase from the rack. As soon as he was in the corridor, Matcham cried: 'All aboard!' while the few passengers who had jumped down to see what was on foot scrambled back. Before Rollison and his party were half way along the platform, the train was steaming out.

Horniman's body had been moved. A man with a large camera was standing nearby, with several other policemen in plain clothes. Matcham joined them and offered Carr the use of his office.

'I won't trouble you for that,' said Carr, 'but I'd like to have the use of a waiting-room for half an hour.' Matcham nodded, accommodatingly. 'I wonder if you and Miss Lancaster will wait in there?' Carr asked Lenwell, and the man nodded limply.

Carr turned to Rollison. 'You'd rather come with me, I expect.'

Rollison agreed with alacrity. He liked and admired Carr, and had always been friendly with the station staff. Carr was anxious to try to find out who had left the station between the time of Horniman's arrival and his death. Rollison was surprised at the men's retentive memories; he had thought it likely that their job would be purely mechanical, not realising the need for a sharp eye on tickets and those who proffered them, the various tricks of the travellers' trade. Patiently, Carr built up a list; there were at least a dozen people who had come on to the platform with platform tickets and gone before the discovery of Horniman's death.

'I'll tell you what, sir,' one of the porters suggested. 'Give us a bit of time and we'll write 'em all down.'

It seemed a satisfactory arrangement, and Matcham promised to arrange for the ticket collectors to have an hour off, in order to concentrate on their task. Carr turned his attention to the bookstall staff, a man of the name of Arthur Goad, and his assistant Philip Taylor.

'I suppose you're too busy to notice much,' Carr suggested.

'Well, I see quite a lot that goes on,' Goad admitted.

'What about, you, young man?' asked Carr, turning to the lad.

‘I saw the way the gentleman was looking: rather funny, I thought it was. And I recognised Mr Rollison,’ Philip added, with a quick, sideways glance. ‘I told Mr Goad that Mr Rollison was on the platform, didn’t I, Mr Goad?’

Rollison smiled affably. ‘What did you think was funny about the man, Philip?’

‘Well, the way he looked,’

‘Frightened?’

‘I wouldn’t exactly say frightened,’ declared Philip, ‘rather, sort of, *savage,* if you know what I mean,’

Goad said: ‘I’ll tell you what I did notice, Superintendent. Two or three people bumped into him, and he gave them a pretty nasty look’

‘Swore at one of them,’ volunteered Philip.

Goad said: ‘He was killed, wasn’t he, Super? That’s why you’re making these inquiries.’

‘It’s possible,’ admitted Carr. He glanced at Rollison. ‘These people who bumped into him, did you notice them?’

‘Yes,’ said Rollison., and added quickly: ‘If both Philip and Mr Goad noticed them, you might get their descriptions separately. We could then compare them with mine and get a pretty good picture. Agreed?’

Philip’s eyes shone with youthful importance. ‘I remember them *clearly*,’ he declared.

On the whole, their descriptions tallied fairly well. They were all agreed that one man had been small, rather humped backed, and with a thin face. The second, at whom Horniman had sworn, had been a plump man wearing a bowler hat and carrying a brief-case. He had fallen over someone’s luggage, and the brief-case had knocked against Horniman’s legs; both of the bookstall attendants were sure about that. The third man they could identify; he travelled to London on the 10.12 two or three times every month. He had knocked against Horniman’s elbow.

‘Did either of the unknowns leave the station, I wonder,’ murmured Rollison.

The ticket collectors and a porter remembered a plump man who had carried a brief-case. They also remembered Welling. ‘He spoke to the gent,’ the porter declared.

‘Which gent?’ asked Carr, quickly.

‘The *dead* gent. I was walking past at the time, I heard what

he said. It wasn't much. "She on?" he said, and the gent said "Yes, so's he." I remember it clear,' said the porter with relish. 'Funny, the way I remember things, always have done, since I was a boy. "She on?" asked the little fellow, "Yes, so's he," said the gent. Then the little man hurried up the train.'

Carr turned to Matcham. 'Where does the train stop?'

'Bournemouth Central, Southampton and then right through.'

Carr said: 'Let me use the telephone, will you?'

He instructed someone in his office to telephone the Southampton and London station police, and gave a description of Welling. When that was done, Rollison said: 'He's probably the man who broke into my room last night, so we might have some luck. What are you going to do with Miss Lancaster and Lenwell?'

'Get a statement,' Carr said, 'I don't see that I can do anything else. I'll have a watch kept for the plump fellow, too.'

'Odd about that brief-case,' said Rollison ruminatively.

Carr stared.

'Well, isn't it odd?' asked Rollison. 'The porter nearly touched it, and brought down the man's wrath. Then he himself, with great carelessness, knocked it against Horniman's legs. I mean, it would be a neat plan, to have a hypo fastened in the bottom of a brief-case, with just enough needle sticking out to puncture the skin of anyone it knocked against. The case would have to be closely guarded, for fear it touched the wrong man by mistake. I'm only making a suggestion,' he added, hastily.

'Well, it's good enough to follow up,' said Carr handsomely. 'You're staying in Bournemouth, I suppose?'

'Until Miss Lancaster's free to leave,' said Rollison.

Half an hour later, Rollison and Susan returned to the Lorne Hall Hotel for coffee. Carr was still talking to Lenwell, who had lapsed into a kind of stupor and took a long time to answer the simplest question. It could have been shock at Horniman's death.

Susan had recovered quickly, and seemed, if anything, more at ease. She told Rollison frankly that the murder made no sense to her whatever.

'Well, you can help to make sense of it,' Rollison said a trifle sharply. 'But before I press you for a story of Horniman's baleful influence, we've got to have one thing clear.'

‘What do you mean?’ asked Susan, her grey eyes widening.

‘Briefly, this: you are known to have quarrelled with Horniman last night, and he has died a violent death. I think he was poisoned. I have suggested to the police that it was administered at the station by an injection, but it might not have been. It might have been given to him any time in the last twenty-four hours. The authorities *might* find out, too, that you have a motive for murdering him, mightn’t they?’

Chapter Eight

Susan's Story

Susan accepted the idea calmly. There was no suggestion now of temper or hysteria. Watching her, Rollison reflected that she was quite lovely enough to have turned Horniman's head. That he could understand. What he found almost impossible to believe was that a man could cold-bloodedly plan to murder her.

'They might *think* I have,' said Susan, 'but I haven't.' She paused. 'You were listening near my door when I talked to him last night, weren't you?'

'Well, yes I was.'

'Then you know he told me that Bruce is still alive,' she said. Her eyes sought the window, noting as in a trance the splendid colour of the flower beds, the trimly cut grass. It was peaceful enough, but there was no peace now in Susan's heart.

'Yes, I know,' said Rollison.

'I didn't like him at first, but when he told me that Bruce was all right, I believed him. Even after the fire and the inquest, I believed him.'

'Of course you did,' Rollison murmured.

'And he was convincing enough,' Susan went on. 'He came to my flat. I remember it because it was a terrible evening; there had been a violent thunderstorm. It was the middle of September, just after that terribly hot spell, and I felt as if life just wasn't worth living.'

She paused, but Rollison did not interrupt her.

'If you'd really known Bruce you would understand,' she went on slowly. 'I felt quite sure that he had been murdered on account of his inventions. At first I wanted vengeance, then … well, it didn't seem to matter what happened. He was gone, nothing could bring him back. Then Horniman called. He told me that Bruce might be alive, that the dead man had been someone else. *Was* I crazy to believe him?' she asked.

Rollison smiled. ‘Well, maybe,’ he said. ‘The state of being crazy comes to us all at times.’

‘But he made it sound so *plausible.* He said that Bruce had known for some time that his life was in danger, because of his inventions. And he said that as large commercial interests were at stake, Bruce had decided to go into hiding until his latest invention was finished. It’s the kind of thing Bruce might do, Rolly. There was only one odd thing: he hadn’t told me anything about it. But Horniman explained that. He said Bruce thought that if I knew where he was someone might get it out of me. It was rather weak, I suppose, but I *wanted* to believe it. Since last night I’ve been thinking that Horniman probably lied from start to finish. But I *did* ask all the reasonable questions.’

‘Such as?’ encouraged Rollison.

‘Well, why had Bruce left the cottage, and who *was* the other man? I thought that if Horniman could explain that, then he must be telling the truth. Everything seemed to hinge on it. I can remember him now, as he sat opposite me. The day had been stormy, and there was a roll of thunder in the distance, as Horniman leaned forward and took my hand. He said: “That is very easy to explain.” I waited, absolutely on edge. “But you must understand that Bruce *is* in danger,” he went on. “He arranged for another man to impersonate him, so as to confuse his enemies.”’

She paused, and Rollison nodded. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘plausible enough to anyone whose nerves were already on edge – but a little frightening.’

‘Of course it was frightening! I knew that Bruce was still in danger, if he were alive. Horniman convinced me that I must make it seem, outwardly, as if I’d put all thought of Bruce out of my mind. I would make Bruce’s enemies think they had got the right man, and so make Bruce safer. I was quite prepared to do anything. There was one worry. Horniman told me that I was being closely watched by those people, and that I might be questioned.’ She caught her breath. ‘I *was,’* she declared.

‘By whom?’ asked Rollison.

‘It was nearly a week afterwards. I had been out to dinner with Horniman, and when I came back a man was waiting for me. A rather frightening little man. He was very round shouldered, almost a deformity, though not quite. He scared me,

Rolly. He said that he was from an insurance company and wanted to know whether I had any idea that Bruce *was* alive. Of course, I denied it. He kept pressing me with questions. Any doubts I might have had of Horniman's story *quite* disappeared then.'

'Yes,' said Rollison. 'That was clever.'

Susan did not heed the interruption.

'I felt absolutely convinced, after that. Horniman told me that Bruce might be away for several months, but that he would send a message whenever he could. A week ago, he suggested that we should spend a few days in Bournemouth. He wanted me to meet people, he said, friends of Bruce's, people who had worked with him and were convinced that he was still alive. I certainly didn't object. Then a note was slipped under my door. It said that I would see Bruce if I caught the early train and went to the Leas Hotel.' She raised her hands, helplessly. 'I flung on my clothes and rushed off. Was I a fool, Rolly?'

'A little over eager, perhaps,' said Rollison.

'I ought to have made sure where the message came from,' said Susan, 'but I didn't think about anything except seeing Bruce. Well, I got to the Leas Hotel, only to be told by Mrs Lenwell that Bruce hadn't been able to come. Horniman sent down some of my clothes, and said he'd told my maid where I was.'

It seemed clear that Horniman had tricked her out of her flat and probably searched it himself, thus accounting for the disorder. He had taken some of her clothes, too, so that she would not worry about getting in touch with her maid for a few days. Thus, to get her away and to gain access, he had risked attracting the attention of the police; but probably he had not expected the maid to raise the alarm so quickly.

'I stayed at the Leas for two days,' Susan went on. 'Then Horniman arrived and said that Bruce had been able to see his mother for a few minutes, and that she was staying at the Lorne Hall Hotel again. Of course, I went to see her.'

'Had you met her with Bruce?'

'No. I knew she'd been abroad. She was very charming,' Susan went on, 'but she was frightened, Rolly, and she frightened me. She said that Bruce lived in continual fear of his life. He had told her that but for Horniman he would be dead. She begged

me to do whatever Horniman told me, and it was that night that Horniman said that the people who were threatening Bruce were still convinced that he was alive. They wanted some kind of proof that I was sure that he was dead, and he suggested, quite casually and rather apologetically, that if I became engaged to someone else, it would be pretty convincing. 'I don't think I would have agreed, but for Mrs Drayton's plea. I did agree, and yet—well it was the first thing that really worried me about Horniman. He had always been very attentive, he became even more attentive then. He even suggested that we should put it about that we were married. Of course I refused. Then last night, he told the Lenwells that we were.'

'Did he, by Jove!'

'He knew she was a gossip-writer,' Susan said, with a catch in her voice. 'And I knew, after that, that he wasn't worrying about me or about Bruce, he simply wanted something for himself. I've never been so frightened. That's why I locked myself in my room and that's why I didn't argue much when you asked me to go to the Norfolk,'

She paused, and then said rather desperately: 'Rolly, you *do* believe me, don't you?'

'Of course I do my dear. I think the police will, too. They might be annoyed, you know. With such a story, you should have gone to them at once. But that would have been discounting the emotional stress and strain. Horniman persisted that the only way to keep Bruce safe was to keep silent, I suppose,'

'He was always rubbing that in.'

'The problem is, to find out what he most wanted. To marry you by hook or by crook or to convince you that Bruce was alive. Are you sure that this Mrs Drayton is Bruce's mother?'

'Well, she said she was.'

'Yes, it's been very neatly contrived,' said Rollison. 'And the arch-contriver apparently now lies dead.'

Susan said in a husky voice: 'Is *Bruce* dead, that is what worries me.'

Rollison looked at her gravely.

'I wouldn't like to say one way or the other,' he told her.

'Rolly, do you mean that, or are you just saying it? Do you think there's a chance that he's alive?'

‘Well, there’s a very good reason why he should be,’ said Rollison. ‘And it’s this: killing Bruce would be killing the goose that lays the golden eggs.’

They stayed at the Lorne Hall Hotel for lunch. Carr came, heard the story, and left saying that he hoped to call on them again a little after two o’clock.

It was actually on the stroke of two when he came into the room his eyes bright, his mien jaunty.

‘Good news, I hope,’ said Rollison.

‘I wouldn’t be surprised,’ said Carr with a grin. ‘I think they’ve got the round-shouldered man. A man answering his description was intercepted at Waterloo.’

‘Who’s got him?’ asked Rollison.

‘The Yard. As Miss Lancaster may be able to identify him, I said that you would both be travelling up to town on the 2.20. It doesn’t give you much time, but you’re already packed, aren’t you?’

Susan jumped up. ‘There are always last minute things to stow away.’

Carr watched her as she ran up the stairs. He looked, thoughtful. Rollison brought him back to the present with a gentle cough.

‘So you’ve passed her back to Scotland Yard?’

‘There was nothing else to do,’ Carr asserted. ‘I’ve let Lenwell go, too. He wasn’t seen near Horniman today, and apparently he was one of the first people to get into the train. He says that his wife caught the 8.35 from the Central and was to have met him outside Swan & Edgar’s soon after two o’clock. He seems scared of her,’ added Carr, thoughtfully.

‘Have you seen her?’

‘No.’

‘You’d be scared!’ Rollison laughed. ‘I suppose all you have to worry about now is finding the plump man with the brief-case,’ he said. ‘Any puncture?’

Carr looked startled. ‘Didn’t I tell you? Yes, just behind the right knee. I’ve practised with a brief-case,’ Carr went on, ‘and it would be about the right height. A casual swing, a prick … no more than that. It would hardly be noticed in one’s surprise at nearly being knocked over. You’re an astonishing man, Mr

Rollison.'

Rollison's eyes held a puzzled expression.

'Astonishing is the word,' he said, ruefully, 'How else could I have overlooked the remarkable feat that nothing has appeared in the gossip columns about Susan's engagement, or, rather, her marriage.'

'I was puzzled about that, too,' Carr said. 'It looks as if Mrs Lenwell changed her mind, or else that the news wasn't considered important enough to be published.'

'Oh, it was important enough. No paper would have refused it. Drayton's death caused a stir, you know, and Susan was quite a figure of tragedy at the inquest. Odd business. Very.'

Rollison and Susan caught the 2.20 with no time to spare. Goad and his assistant waved from the bookstall, and the youth came rushing up as the final whistles blew. He flung the evening paper into the compartment. 'All the best, sir!' he cried, 'all the best!'

'That was rather sweet,' said Susan.

'Very,' smiled Rollison. 'Feeling easier in your mind?'

'Much!'

'You won't know yourself in a few days,' Rollison promised her. But he wondered.

The journey to Waterloo was uneventful, and they steamed into the terminus on time.

Quite a few people were leaving the train and they had to wait their turn for a porter. One came to their assistance at last. Susan pointed to their cases, moving out of his way as she did so. At the same time a plump man walked briskly along the platform, swinging a brief-case.

Chapter Nine

Brief-Case

A surge of alarm shot through Rollison. The plump man was horribly familiar, the swing of the brief-case also; it was this man who had knocked his case against Horniman's legs. He was now striding along the platform as if in a great hurry; and Susan's back was towards him.

Rollison jumped forward and made a grab at the case. It swung wildly, one corner coming perilously towards Rollison as he dodged back. Never had he felt so scared of anything as he did then. Susan, startled, picked up a hold-all from the luggage trolley and flung it at the man. He staggered backwards, waving the brief-case wildly. Rolly braced himself to try again. He felt the corner brush against his arm, then wrenched the case from the man's grip. It slipped to the ground.

''Here!' exclaimed the porter.

'Don't touch that case!' snapped Rollison.

'Police!' cried Susan, at the top of her voice. *'Police!'*

Rollison blessed her, and sprang at the plump man, who, kicking out wildly, caught Rollison an agonising blow on the shin. By then people were hurrying towards them, but there was no sign of the police.

With a flying leap the plump man jumped on to the track.

Rollison limped after him. Two men from the crowd reached the edge of the platform first, but hesitated to jump, fearful of an incoming train.

Rollison jumped, regardless.

The plump man was now running along the line, Rollison behind him. Sleepers and flints made the going hard; he had expected to gain but soon found himself losing ground. Not far along, the platform sloped downwards to the permanent way. He leapt on to it as the plump man raced across the tracks towards the side of the station.

Someone yelled: 'Mind the electricity!'

‘Fool,’ thought Rollison, making good speed. ‘What’s the electricity to do with—’

He stopped abruptly. Not far away were the electrified suburban lines.

Then the plump man turned back towards the platforms. Rollison turned in his wake. Some thirty yards separated them. Suddenly there was the sound of an approaching train. One moment it was a hundred yards away, the next no more than fifty.

The plump man reached the track along which the train was running. He still had a thirty yard lead.

The rumble of the train seemed deafening.

Rollison stood still, watching his quarry.

The man reached the platform and began to haul himself up. *He slipped.* The train was no more than twenty yards away from him. It happened in a flash. He clutched the platform again, and Rollison’s last sight of him was as he made a desperate heave to throw himself out of danger.

Then the train cut him off from view.

A porter clambered to Rollison’s side from the permanent way behind him and muttered: ‘Poor devil.’

Rollison hurried along the platform, sick at heart. The man was either dead or free. After taking a chance like that, he almost deserved to be free.

When he learned that he really had escaped, Rollison was tempted to change his opinion.

Jolly opened the door of the Gresham Terrace flat as Rollison and Susan reached the top of the stairs.

At sight of Susan his glum face broke into a smile. ‘Good evening, Miss Susan.’

Dodging round him came young Higginbottom.

‘Take your bag, sir?’

‘Certainly not,’ said Rollison in alarm. ‘Don’t touch, it.’ He laid it gingerly on the hall table. ‘That has given me more nightmares in an hour than I’ve had in a lifetime. You’re working late, aren’t you?’

‘Where duty calls,’ murmured Higginbottom, righteously.

‘An admirable sentiment,’ said Rollison. ‘Susan, this is Mr Higginbottom, my new amanuensis. Higginbottom, Miss Susan

Lancaster. Now if you really mean the sentiment you have expressed, telephone Scotland Yard for Superintendent Grice, and if he isn't there, try and get him at his home address. Jolly will tell you the number.'

Susan watched him with a smile as he hurried into the living-room.

'Well, we're *here'* she said.

'And *that's* here, too,' said Rollison looking with curiosity at the brief-case. 'Go and tidy up, Susan, you'll find everything you want in the spare room,'

Alone, he approached the case with keen anticipation.

After much trouble and many explanations, he had been allowed to bring it from Waterloo. He had nursed it gently in the taxi, but, because of the constant jolting, had not examined it; and in any case, Grice must be present when it was searched. He felt quite sure that an embedded hypodermic needle would be discovered, and that the plump man had been waiting at the station to kill Susan.

Having looked at it from every angle, Rollison then picked up the brief-case and took it into the living-room. Higginbottom was at the telephone. 'The Superintendent's on the line, Mr Rollison,'

'Thanks.' Rollison put the case on the desk and added; 'Touch it at risk of your life.' He took the receiver.

'Welcome home,' greeted Grice.

'And what a welcome! You've heard from Bournemouth, I suppose?'

'Indeed I have.'

'I've got the brief-case here,' said Rollison. 'Come and have some dinner with me,'

'I've dined.' said Grice 'but I'll come over.' He paused, and then added: 'Are you sure it's the same brief-case?'

'No. But I wouldn't mind taking a hundred to one bet on it.'

Grice gave a grim little laugh. 'Well, expect me in half an hour.'

Rollison replaced the receiver.

'Ever seen a case like that before?' he asked Higginbottom, indicating the brief-case.

Snub looked up. 'I can't say I have,' he admitted, 'but then, I haven't seen anything like *that* before.' He glanced at the wall of

the living-room. It was adorned, with a miscellany of souvenirs from criminal cases in which Rollison had been involved; a collection that was both Rollison's joy and Jolly's sorrow.

Rollison shook his head as he surveyed the wall.

'The case is too big to go up there,' he said regretfully, 'though I might be able to do something with the handle,' He sat on the corner of his desk. 'How much do you know of what's been going on?' he asked.

'Well … most of it, I think.'

'How come?'

'Jolly's been very helpful,' Snub told him.

'Well, that's a comfort. The taming of Jolly, I mean. Congratulations. How is the quest for rooms going?'

'Jolly's fixed that,' said Snub, cheerfully. 'Is there anything Jolly can't fix?'

'Not much,' said Rollison. 'He's a good model to follow,'

He looked with approval at Higginbottom. 'Well, if you're not too busy, you might clear the desk of everything except the briefcase, and touch that only with a handkerchief or gloves, we don't want any more prints on it.' He nodded, smiled and went out. Jolly appeared from the kitchen.

'You haven't dined, sir, I suppose?'

'No. Can you fix something?'

'I have made arrangements with the restaurant,' said Jolly reassuringly.

Rollison went into the dining-room and found Susan standing in front of the mirror. She turned to face him, her expression grave.

'Gin and tonic or sherry?' Rollison asked.

'Sherry,' said Susan. 'Dry, please.' She took her glass and then put it down again.

'Rolly, what can I say? What can anyone say, when you've saved their life twice in twenty-four hours?'

'Luck!' declared Rollison.

'Yes, luck that you were with me … thank you, Rolly.'

'You know, you're taking this much too seriously,' Rollison told her. 'This isn't exactly a new medium for me. One learns by practice and some things become habitual. You know Grice, don't you? Nice chap. A policeman with a conscience who will ask you many questions, and it will be even less wise to lie to

him than to me.'

'I have *not* lied to you.'

'That was simply my way of impressing you with the personality of Grice,' Rollison assured her hastily. 'Now, I think —'

From outside the flat, but not far away, there came a scream, a sound of sheer horror. A wild, howling, banshee note which quivered through the air. Once … twice. The second time it reached an awful crescendo almost beyond human endurance to hear. Jolly, and all of them crowded on to the landing, Susan clutching Rollison's arm.

'Rolly, what—' she broke off, with a gasp. 'Stop it!' she cried, 'stop it!'

From somewhere below another scream came.

Jolly was half way down the stairs as Rollison reached his side. They could see a woman standing on the landing below, her head thrown back, the scream thinned now to a shrill whistle of sound.

Rollison stopped abruptly. He was a little below Susan, and with a sudden, violent gesture he pushed her aside and raced up the stairs. There was a shadow against the inner wall of his flat. But the flat should be empty. He neared the doorway as the shadow grew darker, blacker.

A man came out of Rollison's flat, carrying a brief-case.

Chapter Ten

Frightened Lady

The man was a smallish fellow wearing a hat and a scarf. Rollison could not see his face. He held the brief-case in one hand and a gun in the other. Susan saw the gun, and cried in a high, clear voice: 'Rolly, look out!' The man swung round towards Rollison, as Rollison dived towards him. There was a flash and a roar. How the bullet missed him Rollison did not know. All he felt was a resounding blow on the side of the head as he hit the wall.

Rollison staggered up, dazed from the blow. Snub had wrested the gun from the man's hand and was struggling for the brief-case. The corner of it was nearly touching his leg. Rollison went forward, filled with a desperate anxiety; that corner must not touch Snub's leg.

Waiting for the right moment, he suddenly shot out a hand and gripped the intruder's wrist. The case fell, and was kicked to one side. The would-be thief drove his knee into Snub's stomach, sent Susan flying, and raced down the stairs.

Snub had recovered sufficiently to take charge both of Susan and the brief-case, so Rollison went downstairs, visions of the intruder vivid in his mind. A crowd was still gathered about the woman who had screamed, but now she was silent. She sat with her back against the wall in a state of collapse, her rather too golden hair awry.

Her eyes were half-closed.

Rollison looked at her sharply for a moment or two and then bent down and picked her up. Jolly, alongside, gave an air of balance and decorum to the whole proceeding as he carried her up the stairs,

Rollison strode into the flat and dumped his burden, none too gently, into a chair.

Susan started forward indignantly. 'Rolly, she's ill!'

‘Fiddlesticks!’ declared Rollison robustly. ‘She has a very healthy, powerful set of lungs which she has used with great professionalism.’ He leaned forward. ‘You *are* a professional, aren’t you?’

The girl – she was little more – jerked her head back.

‘I don’t know what you mean. I was taken ill. My nerves, I—’

‘Now I’ll tell you the truth,’ said Rollison. ‘You—’

‘The doctor always says that a little tot of something will do me good after an attack,’ said the girl. She fluttered heavily mascared lashes. ‘Whisky,’ she added, ‘or—or brandy.’

Rollison chuckled. ‘But before you take anything to strengthen your nerves, you are going to hear my version of the incident. You were bribed to create a disturbance, or maybe did it for love, so that a friend of yours could slip into my flat and take away a brief-case. Remember?’

‘I wasn’t!’ The girl began to look really scared. ‘I was taken ill, I can show you a doctor’s certificate!’ She began to look round for her bag, then jumped up in alarm. ‘My bag! Where is it? I must have left it downstairs.’ Alarm had turned into something closely akin to panic. ‘I must get it, I tell you, all—all my money’s in that bag!’

Jolly murmured: ‘Is this the bag. Miss?’ He held out a small, imitation crocodile bag.

The girl snatched at it, but Rollison was before her. He stood back with the bag in his hand, while the girl stood glaring at him. She had gone white.

‘Get her a drink. Snub,’ said Rollison.

He opened the bag, and strewed the contents carefully on to the table. The girl jumped forward, but Rollison fended her off.

‘Are you sure you ought to do this?’ asked Susan, uncertainly.

‘Quite sure,’ said Rollison blandly. ‘Now, what have we here?’ he added, standing back with a restraining hand on the girl’s arm and contemplating the oddments on the table. ‘Powder compact, lipstick, book of stamps, eyebrow pencil, rouge, but … surprise surprise – *no* doctor’s certificate!’

‘Give me those things!’

Snub jogged her elbow. ‘Here we are,’ he said, ‘a double scotch and I only added a splash. That ought to steady your nerves.’

She took the glass and drank half the contents at a gulp.

Rollison continued his inventory of the articles on the table.

'A handkerchief, a little red purse …'

The girl was breathing heavily, straining forward, held back only by Snub, whose grip was more powerful than it appeared to be. Her gaze was fixed on the purse, which was the only thing that Rollison had picked up.

'Drink up,' urged Snub. 'Waste not, want not.'

The girl flung the whisky, glass and all, at Rollison. He dodged to one side. The glass hit a chair and broke. Jolly raised his eyebrows with a self-righteous frown of resignation, and went into the kitchen. Hardly a moment passed before he was back with a cloth, dustpan and brush. He began to sweep up the mess.

Quietly Rollison started to open the purse.

'No, don't!' she cried, 'don't do that!'

Rollison shook the contents out on to the palm of his hand. First, there fell something which scintillated with astonishing brilliance, then followed a tightly folded piece of paper.

Rollison selected the jewel. It was a diamond pendant, a lovely thing of great value; certainly much more valuable than anything this girl might have been expected to own.

'That's quite a bauble,' he said, looking at the now terrified girl.

'Rolly, what *is* it?' asked Susan.

'We'll find out,' said Rollison. He opened the folded paper.

There was no writing on it; but there was a rubber-stamped impression of a claw-headed hammer. Rollison picked up the pendant again, and weighed it in his hand.

'Instructions and reward,' he murmured.

The girl did not speak.

Rollison pulled a chair up and sat in front of her.

'You're a silly girl,' he said, gently. 'You shouldn't accept bribes of this kind even from the Hammer. It will only get you into trouble with the police. You know that, don't you?' When she did not reply, he went on: 'I don't propose to tell the police about this, provided you tell me the truth. The Hammer sent you instructions to come here and create a disturbance, didn't he? And as reward, he sent you this diamond pendant.'

After a long pause, she muttered: 'Yes, he did.'

'Is it the first time you've worked for him?'

She caught her breath. ‘Yes!’

‘That isn’t true,’ said Rollison.

‘It—I—no, it isn’t true,’ she gasped, ‘but I had to do it, I had to because the Hammer made me.’ She was scarcely coherent. ‘It isn’t any use refusing, no use at all.’

‘How did you get the message?’

‘A kid brought it,’ she said. ‘I had a message to meet him at Aldgate station, he told me to come here right away and kick up a fuss. I *had* to obey. Those who—’ she broke off.

‘Go on,’ murmured Rollison.

‘Those who don’t do what he says get what’s coming to them,’ she said, and now there was a hopeless note in her voice.

Susan stirred restlessly, but did not speak. There was a long pause before the girl went on again.

‘He’s got a hold over me,’ she said sullenly.

Rollison did not press her to explain; but that she had been blackmailed in a curiously unusual fashion was clear enough. Yet was it so unusual? She had been given a jewel that was probably stolen; and, once she kept it for herself, she would be further in the clutches of the man who had sent it to her, for she would have received stolen goods.

Rollison began to dislike the Hammer very much indeed.

He asked: ‘Do you know who came here to break into my flat?’

‘No, no, I didn’t know why I had to do it, he didn’t tell me anything else, he just told me to come here,’ She turned to Rollison with a flare of defiance. ‘Are you going to tell the police?’

Rollison shook his head. ‘Not this time, but I’ll keep the note and the jewel. If it isn’t stolen, you shall have it back.’

She sniffed, not daring to be openly hostile.

‘Who are you, and where do you live?’ asked Rollison.

‘Ethel Kent,’ she said, and gave him her address in a sullen undertone.

Rollison barely caught it, for his thoughts were on the attempt to retrieve the brief-case. He smiled at Susan. ‘Take her into the spare room and let her tidy up,’ he said. ‘Hurry, because the police are coming to see me.’

Susan took the girl away. Slowly, Rollison replaced the contents of the bag, except the note and the pendant.

'Now I know why you're considered so good,' said Snub, with transparent admiration. 'I wouldn't have pieced that together in a month of August Bank Holidays.'

'You'll learn,' Rollison said absently. 'Feel like stretching your legs?'

Snub's eyes glistened.

'Don't I!'

'Go downstairs, wait until the girl comes out, and then follow her,' said Rollison. 'Don't take any chances, lose her rather than get your skull cracked, but if you can find out who speaks to her and where she goes, it will be helpful. Off with you!'

Snub went out and Rollison spoke to Jolly. 'Will you make sure that he isn't followed in turn?' he asked. 'If he is, do some snooping yourself. If he isn't, come back here.'

'Very good, sir.'

Soon, Ethel Kent came hurrying back, on edge to get away.

'Shall I get her a taxi?' Susan asked.

'No,' said Rollison, 'she'll be all right. Ethel—' he waited until the girl looked straight at him. 'If you get into trouble about this, tell me. Don't worry because I'm friendly with the police. I won't let you down, and I will help. Do you understand?'

'Yes,' she muttered.

Rollison handed her her bag.

'I think I'll go with her a little way,' said Susan.

Rollison saw them off, doubly glad that he had sent Snub to follow the girl and that Jolly was also on the look-out. Left on his own, he poured himself out a drink and sat back in an easy chair, looking at the brief-case. Of its vital importance there was no longer any doubt; or the fact that the Hammer wanted it badly. He wished that he knew more about the Hammer. He thought of everything he could remember about the newspaper article and wondered, now, whether he had been wise to take it so lightly. He felt guilty, too. For many years the East End had been his especial beat, but lately he had been inclined to stay in the West End, going East only when there were signs of trouble. A visit was indicated in the near future, and he wondered how well he would be received by his old-time friends.

He looked at the jewel. If he were right, this had been stolen recently. The more he thought of it the more certain he felt that it had been used both to pay the girl for her task and to get her

further into the Hammer's clutches. A clever, even a brilliant, move.

Grice should know something about him. There were few people at Scotland Yard whom Rollison knew well these days for there had been a spate of retirements and promotions. The younger men did not know Rollison, except by reputation, and they were doubtless sceptical about that; he certainly did not blame them. He still had friends there, but none who knew the East End well. Like changes had taken place in the divisional police stations. Grice was, in fact, his one reliable link with the past.

The new Chief Constable, Meredith, had been promoted from the C.I.D. Branch. A stolid, worthy fellow, but one who had never had any time for the Toff, for he disliked unorthodoxy and all breaches of regulations. Rollison did not think that had been a change for the better; certainly Grice had been wise when he had warned him to move carefully.

There were footsteps on the landing. Rollison opened the front door, and Grice came in, He led him into the sitting-room, and Grice's eyes immediately turned towards the brief-case. Rollison took the pendant from his pocket and toyed with it. The fiery darts sped everywhere, until at last they caught Grice's eye. He turned.

'What's that?' he asked, and then, when he saw the pendant, he demanded in a taut voice: 'Where the devil did you get that? That's a Hammer job.'

Chapter Eleven

The Poison

‘And who might the Hammer be?’ asked Rollison, innocently.

Grice was examining the pendant. It was sufficiently unusual in shape, cut and setting to be easily recognisable, and his expression seemed to confirm his first judgement. The immediate tension had gone, but there was a grim note in his voice when he spoke.

‘Being in possession of stolen goods isn’t a wise practice, Rolly, even for you.’

‘But I’ve handed it over to the police,’ Rollison told him, reasonably. ‘Are you sure it’s a stolen gem?’

‘Quite sure. What do you know about the Hammer?’

‘Next to nothing. I can tell you that Horniman received a warning note from him before he died, and that the girl who had that pendant was scared out of her wits by the gentleman. That’s the lot.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me that the Hammer was connected with Horniman’s death?’

‘Come and have a drink,’ invited Rollison, with a hand on Grice’s arm. ‘The answer is, that I didn’t know until I was about to leave Bournemouth, and this is the first time I’ve seen you since then. Be fair. What will you have?’

‘Nothing thanks. Oh, all right, a soft one.’ Grice, a teetotaller, followed Rollison into the dining-room, demanding to know more. Rollison told him the whole story, omitting only the girl’s name and address. Then he in turn demanded to know more about the Hammer.

‘The trouble is, that no one knows much about him,’ Grice said, reflectively, ‘and most of what one does hear is conflicting. He certainly manages to pull off smash-and-grab raids with expert precision. In some of them there’s been violence, and yet —’

‘A policeman on the horns of a dilemma,’ murmured Rollison.

‘Let’s have it.’

Grice laughed. ‘The truth is, Rolly, that a man calling himself the Hammer is credited with dispensing a lot of charity to the deserving poor of the East End. Charitable organisations and churches get anonymous gifts, always in cash, which can’t be traced. Putting two and two together, it seems likely that the Hammer does his jobs, cashes in, and pays conscience money. But there’s another curious feature about him.’

‘Jekyll and Hyde?’ suggested Rollison.

Grice took him seriously. ‘That’s really what it amounts to,’ he said. ‘At first – he started some two years ago – there was no suggestion of violence. He used a claw-headed hammer to break windows and force doors. He always lifted his stuff by night when there was no real danger, and he got away without any trouble. The nearest we came to getting him was one night last year, when he had to leave his hammer behind.

‘Soon after that,’ Grice went on, ‘there was a job with all the trade marks of the same man, but a nightwatchman was badly injured. From then onwards, crimes of violence mounted, but at the same time – sometimes on the same nights, in fact – other crimes with the same trade mark were committed without violence.

‘On two occasions there were breakings-in by the Hammer that were interrupted by a nightwatchman and a policeman. The Hammer could have knocked them out and got away with a nice haul; but he didn’t. Yet other crimes of violence, apparently committed by the same man, certainly by the same methods, showed a ruthless disregard of life. One man died as a result of his injuries. Curious, isn’t it?’

‘Very.’

‘You know what it’s like when the East End just shuts its mouth and refuses to speak,’ went on Grice. ‘They’re like that over the Hammer. The divisional people can’t get a squeak out of them. People who usually won’t help to cover up violence, do cover up the Hammer’s jobs. We’ve played low on it and the newspapers have been helpful.’ Grice shrugged. ‘If it weren’t for the violence, more than one man at the Yard would have a soft spot for the Hammer. Some think there are two separate people. Others are pretty sure that the Hammer is deliberately confusing us. Barrow’s one of those, by the way.’

‘Ah! The bright sergeant. How is he?’

Grice said slowly. ‘Between you and me, I’m beginning to dislike Barrow. He’s clever, he’s got a nose for the job, but he’s too full of his own conceit. He’s got the ear of authority though, especially Meredith,’

‘Ah, the Chief Wallah, no friend of yours, I take it.’

‘We could get on better,’ agreed Grice absently, his mind obviously elsewhere. ‘Now this is the first real line we’ve got on the Hammer. Can you tell me anything else about it, some small detail, perhaps, you might have overlooked?’

Rollison took out the folded paper, opened it and handed it to the detective.

‘Horniman had a letter with the same signature,’ he said.

‘How do you know?’

‘I saw it.’ There was an air of innocent mockery in Rollison’s manner. ‘This was in the girl’s bag tonight.’

‘She might give us a lead,’ Grice said.

‘If she can, I’ll tell you,’ promised Rollison. ‘I rather think she’s a harmless little creature, and I also think she’s being blackmailed. Can we leave it at that?’

Grice looked uncertain. ‘Well … oh, all right,’ he said, ‘but I ought to make you sign a statement.’ He changed the subject, abruptly. ‘What about the brief-case?’

Rollison launched into Susan’s story, and was just finishing when first Susan and then Jolly returned. Susan greeted Grice composedly enough and, after a questioning glance at Rollison, agreed to sign a statement covering everything she had told him.

‘That secretary of yours could type it,’ Grice suggested.

Rollison grinned. ‘Sorry, he’s out. But I’ll have it done and sent to you, if you like.’

‘All right,’ conceded Grice. ‘What do you make of it all?’ Rollison considered at some length. The question was inevitable, but it was too early to give a considered opinion. There seemed no reasonable connection between the organiser of London smash-and-grab raids with, apparently, a split personality, and Horniman and Bruce Drayton. Yet, clear in his mind’s eye, was that impression of a claw hammer. Grice would expect some kind of an analysis of the situation, too, and he had been helpful enough to deserve one.

He temporised.

'Do you mean about the Hammer?'

'Leave him out of it,' suggested Grice, 'and concentrate on the Horniman business. Or the Drayton business, if you prefer to think about it that way. Do you think Drayton's alive?'

'It wouldn't surprise me.' Rollison glanced uncertainly at Susan. 'I hoped Horniman would tell us. As it is, we'll have to find out what we can. You've got the names of all the people who saw Horniman at the Norfolk, haven't you?'

Grice nodded.

'And Welling was picked up at Waterloo,' Rollison went on. 'Is there anything from him?'

'Sullen silence,' said Grice with a shrug.

'Well, he can't do any more damage,' Rollison reflected. 'It looks reasonably certain that after you'd refused to play with the marriage story, Susan, Horniman decided that you were better dead. First, he tried to have you killed in the room, then sent Welling to try again on the train. That's when things started to go topsy-turvy. One would have said that whoever wanted Horniman dead wanted Susan alive. The plump customer undoubtedly killed Horniman. He may be an emissary of the Hammer. It wasn't true to form that he should later try to kill Susan, though. But try he did, I think,' Rollison added, thoughtfully. 'Of course, he *might* have merely wanted to scare her, but the reasonable thing to assume is that he tried again what had already worked once.'

Grice frowned thoughtfully.

'The question is, why should both of them want Susan dead, and why isn't there something in her story more damning to Horniman?' Rollison went on. 'The story would have sent you hurrying to interview Horniman, but that's all. True, you might have found proof that he had something to do with the burned man, but I doubt it. After all, he knew that you knew he was interested and might press him if murder could be established. Right?'

Grice nodded, and Susan stirred.

'What you're really saying, Rolly, is that I haven't told you everything.'

'Wrong,' said Rollison. 'I'm saying that you may have learned something from Horniman or one of his friends without

realising its significance.'

'Such as?' asked Grice.

Rollison shrugged his shoulders. 'Shall we say, reasonable evidence that Bruce is alive? Certainly he's either dead or wilfully missing – not *his* will. Kidnapped!'

Susan took it calmly. 'I've wondered about that,' she said.

'When was the last time you heard from him personally, Miss Lancaster?' asked Grice.

'I had a letter on the day that he first disappeared,' said Susan. 'You've already seen it.'

'And you had no real indication from Horniman that he's alive?'

'The nearest to a *real* indication, I suppose, is when I saw Mrs Drayton,' Susan said.

Grice shook his head. 'Mrs Drayton is still in America,' he said calmly. 'The woman to whom you were introduced is an acquaintance of Horniman's. I am going to see her tonight,' he added, 'but there's no crime in pretending to be someone else unless you've a criminal motive.'

Then a waiter arrived from the restaurant with the dinner Jolly had ordered. Nothing else of very much importance was said, and when the meal was over Grice eyed Susan shrewdly and said that she looked tired out and ought to go to bed.

'Quite right,' said Rollison. 'The police will protect her, I hope.'

'She needn't worry about anything happening tonight,' Grice assured him, adding as an afterthought: 'There is one thing, Miss Lancaster. A registered letter arrived for you on the day you left for Bournemouth for the second time and your maid posted it on to you as soon as your address was known. What was in it?'

Susan looked blank. 'A registered letter? This is the first I've heard of it,' she said.

Grice frowned. 'I know that it was forwarded.'

'You might find it among Horniman's luggage,' suggested Rollison. 'He probably took it from the desk for her at the Lorne Hall Hotel. Did he take your other correspondence, Susan?'

'I didn't have any.'

'We can soon check that,' Grice said.

Downstairs, Sergeant Barrow was waiting in the shadows, and

appeared when Grice called for him. He followed Susan, whose flat was within easy walking distance. Another policeman followed them. Rollison smiled as he watched them disappear, and spoke as he and Grice walked back up the stairs: 'You're being very thorough, Bill.'

'I've got to be.'

'Yes,' thought Rollison, 'that was true enough.' There had been a change in Grice from the moment he had seen the jewel. It was possible he thought that relevant facts were being kept from him; Rollison's reticence about Ethel Kent could have suggested it. On the other hand, the change might be due to Grice's preoccupation with the Hammer. Organised robbery with violence was a major concern at Scotland Yard.

'Well,' Rollison said, 'we've got to the brief-case at last.' He pointed to a corner. 'You can just see the needle.'

Grice leaned forward. The leather was soft and pliable, and through it the needle stuck out perhaps an eighth of an inch.

'I haven't opened it yet,' Rollison said virtuously.

'Good.' Grice took out a pair of cotton gloves, put them on and then opened the case. It was not locked. Within one of the compartments he found the hypodermic syringe. It was fastened into position with adhesive tape. There was a steel spring, cleverly inserted so as to press the plunger, controlled by a length of steel controlled from the handle.

After several minutes, Grice got it cut.

It was half full of a pale yellow liquid.

'Ah,' murmured Rollison. 'So they meant to get Susan. Nice fellow, that fat man.'

'We'll have to test it before we can be sure.'

'Oh, yes. What poison killed Horniman?'

'One of the barbiturates,' Grice said. 'The stuff works almost instantaneously. But it's not easy to come by. I doubt whether anyone but a doctor would think of using it.'

'Or a qualified chemist.'

'Well, yes. But neither doctors nor chemists often go off the rails,' Grice pointed out, 'I'll have the thing tested for prints, but I expect the man wore gloves.'

'Nice, thick hogskins,' Rollison told him. After a contemplative pause, he added: 'I have a feeling that I've seen that plump johnny before.'

‘One of Horniman’s visitors, do you mean?’

‘No, I’ve got *them* clearly etched on my mind,’ said Rollison. ‘The two who stand out are Mrs Drayton, and the woman Lenwell. Two very different types. What did you say Mrs Drayton’s real name was?’

‘I didn’t, she’s a Mrs Willis, a widow with ample means.’

‘Well-groomed, good taste, quite a figure,’ said Rollison, ‘but Mrs Lenwell was of the blousy, hearty type. I wonder what the meeting was about.’

Grice smiled. ‘I know,’ he said.

‘Do you, by Jove! Then spare a crumb for a hungry man.’

‘You’re never satisfied without a full course meal,’ Grice retorted. ‘But it’s simple enough. He was going to promote a company, presumably to develop Bruce Drayton’s new invention. Horniman had persuaded all these people to invest fairly heavily. A total of nearly a hundred and twenty thousand pounds is involved. The Lenwells were down for ten thousand, although I wouldn’t have thought they were wealthy enough for that. Mrs Willis was also down for ten thousand, but that isn’t surprising. I *think* that’s all there is to it,’ Grice added, cautiously. ‘Each person interested was given a sheet of paper covered with technical data. They’re to do with the manufacturing process and represented a security, according to Horniman, but they’re probably worthless. When I’ve collected them all, I’ll get an expert’s opinion.’

‘And was the deal put through at Bournemouth?’

‘Presumably. They certainly settled details there. Most of these people looked on Horniman as a kind of fairy godmother who was going to wave a wand and turn their pieces of silver into gold. I doubt whether Mrs Willis was quite so easily gulled. Mrs Lenwell might have been, she’s the optimistic kind. Well, it looks as if they’ll get their money back now.’

‘Is it available?’

‘Oh yes. Horniman had a big bank credit, and it will come out of the estate.’

‘Hmm,’ said Rollison. ‘A hundred and twenty thousand would be quite a picking, though, if Horniman were bucket-shopping.’ He thought of, but did not mention, the prospectuses in Horniman’s case. Grice’s information tied up nicely with that. It suggested that Horniman was confident of getting possession of

the new process. The amounts involved and the range of investors were too wide, for it to be likely that he had intended to promote a fraudulent company.

'What do you really know of Bruce Drayton?' asked Grice.

'Not a lot really. He appeared to be quiet and pleasant enough, with no noticeably outstanding quality. I don't know anything about his family, if that's what you mean.'

'What about Miss Lancaster?'

Rollison shrugged. 'Absolutely in the clear. I've known her most of my life.'

Grice said: 'I'll back your judgement there, anyhow.' Rollison looked at him thoughtfully.

'Only there?'

'I'm not so sure about your man, Higginbottom,' said Grice, to Rollison's surprise. 'Nor am I altogether happy about him. You're keeping him fairly well-informed, aren't you? I don't mind giving you a thing or two off the record, but there are limits. Don't you think it curious that he applied for the job just now?'

'He didn't apply, he advertised and Jolly wrote to him.'

'Do you know where Jolly posted the letters answering the advertisements?'

'In Audley Street, presumably.' Rollison cast his mind back, and went on: 'He wanted me to post them, then found that he had time before he left for Bournemouth. That's the nearest box on his way. Why?'

'On that particular night someone tried to rob that post box,' Grice said. 'It might actually have been robbed. A constable saw someone with a car standing near it, and thought that a tube had been pushed into the box, probably a suction tube, to draw letters up. Yours *could* have been opened, and one of the applicants could have been impersonating a man to whom you wrote.'

'I suppose you could be right,' Rollison admitted, reluctantly. 'But all the people turned up, you know, which proves that the letters were delivered. I still back Snub Higginbottom.'

'What about his references?' asked Grice.

'I didn't follow them up.'

Grice threw up his hands. 'There's no limit to the crazy things you do! You like the look in a man's eyes and take him on trust.

Personally, I would watch him.'

'I'll do that,' Rollison promised.

Grice left soon afterwards, carrying the case and the hypodermic syringe with him as well as the diamond pendant.

Rollison was in a thoughtful, rather troubled mood. It was true that he had liked Snub on sight, but it was possible that he had been taken in. Grice would not have lied about the attempt to rifle the post box, and he had probably checked on the incident because he doubted Snub's credentials.

Rollison called for Jolly, and put the question baldly: 'Do you think Higginbottom's reliable, Jolly?'

Jolly answered without a moment's hesitation.

'I consider him a most trustworthy young man, sir, and, if I may say so, a tribute to your perspicacity in selecting him. You have no reason to think otherwise, I hope.'

'Grice has sown the seeds of suspicion. Did you post the letters in Audley Street?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Pillar box was rifled,' said Rollison. 'It's odd. Oh, well, Grice will check on him, and if he finds anything wrong he'll tell me quickly enough. You know, I shouldn't like to think ill of Snub.'

'I feel quite confident, sir,' Jolly assured him, and then glanced at the telephone as the bell began to ring. 'Excuse me, sir.' He lifted the receiver, and after a pause he said: 'Yes, hold on one moment. It's Mr Higginbottom, sir.'

Rollison took the receiver.

He could see Snub's merry face in his mind's eye. He remembered the speed with which Snub had acted on the landing and in the hall, his competence, his light-hearted gaiety.

'I say,' said Snub, in a whisper which Rollison could only just hear, 'I *think* I'm on to something.'

'And your skull's still whole?'

'Never mind my skull,' said Snub. 'I followed Bright-eyes and her first trip was to the home of the Lenwells. She didn't stay long, and after that she indulged in a taxi. She's now at the house of a Dr Finnigan, in Bray Street, Notting Hill. Frowsty-ish neighbourhood. Bray Street's a bit above it. Brass plate and all that kind of thing. She went in, and I tried to follow, but the door beat me. Still, I heard yelling.'

'Yelling?'

‘Not another hysterical attack.’ Rollison could almost see Snub’s grin. ‘A quarrel. Bright-eyes and a man, possibly the dear doctor. But the thing is, another customer went in three minutes ago. He took a long time opening the door, and as he wasn’t drunk, I should say that he used a skeleton key … if there *are* such things,’ added Snub, virtuously.

‘I’ll come at once,’ Rollison told him.

Chapter Twelve

Dr. Finnigan

Snub whispered: ‘The girl’s gone. The man’s still inside.’

‘Quiet,’ warned Rollison.

They stood in the porch of Dr Finnigan’s house, a tall, narrow building in a terrace which seemed to be unending. A faint light shone from inside the hall, but there were no sounds. Rollison tried the door, but it was locked. He examined the key-hole.

‘Easy one?’ asked Snub.

‘Fairly.’

‘Have a shot at it,’ urged Snub.

Rollison said: ‘Go into the street and walk slowly up and down. Keep a watchful eye on the doorways opposite and on either side of this one. I thought I saw a man in one of them when I came past.’

‘Okay,’ said Snub. ‘Are you going in?’

‘Probably.’

Snub slipped away, into the gloom. Rollison waited. The youngster seemed able to move with remarkable quietness, for he heard no sound. He sensed that Snub was peering into every nearby doorway. Rollison wondered whether he himself had really seen a lurking man, or whether his imagination had been playing him tricks.

He began to work at the lock. He had not the proper tools, and it would take him at least five minutes. He made hardly a sound, but his eyes and ears were alert for the slightest sign of trouble. He felt confident that Snub would give him warning of any danger from the street; if it came without warning, that would give point to Grice’s suspicions. Rollison thrust that barb of disquiet aside. He thought of Dr Finnigan; a doctor must have supplied the barbiturate drug to the Hammer, or to whoever had killed Horniman. This might be the man; and it began to look as if he had been wrong to assume that Ethel Kent had no real part in this affair.

The lock clicked back.

He waited for a moment, then slowly opened the door. The light came from a room a little way along the passage. He heard something fall, something light and brittle. There was a muttered imprecation. Then a shadow appeared opposite the open door.

Rollison pressed close to the wall, waiting; the man would be so surprised that he would have little chance to defend himself.

He came in sight.

A sibilant whisper from behind him. 'There's—'

It was Snub, but Rollison did not hear the finish of his warning, for the man who had come from the room heard the beginning and leapt forward. There was a gun in his hand. He smashed at Rollison, who avoided the blow and shot out his leg, but the man was ready for it and jumped clear. A backhander struck Rollison across the face, and made him lose a precious moment. The man reached the porch. There was a thud, as of bodies colliding, and then the roar of a shot. In the vivid flash, Rollison saw Snub's face; and near him that of another man.

The gunman turned towards the main road, his footsteps thudding on the pavement. Snub shouted: *'Police, police!'* and then began to give chase. Rollison followed, relieved to know that Snub could not be badly hurt. Yet the gun had gone off only a yard away from him; he *must* surely have been hit!

Rollison thought of the second man, that vague face behind Snub. He hesitated and looked over his shoulder. The man was running away in the opposite direction, and was now beneath a street lamp. One thing was clear; his right arm hung limp by his side. Rollison swung round. The gunman must be left to Snub, this runaway must be stopped.

Rollison overtook the man easily, as a middle-aged man came hurrying out of a doorway.

'What the hell's the matter?'

As he spoke, the running man faltered, then fell. Rollison waited only long enough to see other people coming from neighbouring houses, enough and to spare to make sure that the man did not get away, and then turned back in the other direction. He could see Snub and the gunman, not far from the main road.

A shot rang out.

Snub kept running.

'He's got plenty of guts,' Rollison thought, and put on an extra spurt. Then he heard the welcome blast of a police whistle and saw a uniformed policeman turn into the street. The gunman was now between Snub and the policeman. He hesitated, then spun round. He was only a few yards from Snub …

Snub flung himself sideways. The gunman came running towards Rollison, who slipped into a gateway and waited. The pounding footsteps drew nearer, the policeman's footsteps seemed like an echo of the gunman's. Rollison prepared to put his leg out.

He heard the man's breathing.

He shot out his foot.

The man ran into it and pitched forward, and the gun went flying from his hand. It passed dangerously close to Rollison's head. The man picked himself up, but he was too shaken to put up much resistance, and soon the policeman, followed by others, came hurrying towards the scene. The passers-by had gained courage, and were pressing forward. Among them, Rollison saw Snub.

Rollison pushed forward and whispered: 'Get away now, you've done enough.'

'But—'

'Hurry!' whispered Rollison, and Snub gave a rueful grin and disappeared into the darkness.

Rollison went into the gateway where he had been hiding, searched for and found the gun. It was a heavy service revolver.

'What's *he* been up to, sir?' asked the constable.

'Doing what he didn't ought,' said Rollison, jocularly. 'He used this.' The revolver changed hands.

'Thank you, sir, this man's under arrest.' There was a formal charge, during which Rollison's thoughts roamed to Dr Finnigan's house. What had happened to the man at the other end of the street, the fellow he first saw behind Snub? As he walked along with the police and the captive, he reasoned that there was a simple explanation of the fact that Snub had escaped being shot: the gunman had fired at the *other* fellow; and, if that limply hanging arm meant anything, he had scored a hit.

They were close to the doctor's house when a man detached

himself from the little crowd further along, and came hurrying up to the surgery.

'Half a minute,' said the sergeant easily. 'What's the trouble?'

'A man along here is hurt,' said the messenger, breathlessly. 'It looks as if he's been shot. The doctor—'

'I'll get him,' said the sergeant.

Rollison thought: 'Will he, I wonder?'

He followed the sergeant into the house. The sergeant reached the open door of a room which looked like the surgery. He stood on the threshold, blocking the way. Rollison looked over his shoulder, hearing the man draw in a deep breath.

A small, fair-haired man was sitting at a roll-top desk. His hands were stretched out in front of him. He did not move. The sergeant hesitated.

'It—it's Dr Finnigan,' said the sergeant.

Rollison moved forward and touched Finnigan's shoulder; and Finnigan toppled forward.

Rollison picked up the telephone.

Grice was not in his office, and Rollison left a message. The sergeant, who had recognised him, said sourly that this was a matter for the divisional staff, not for Scotland Yard, and put a call through to the Notting Hill police station. Rollison said little, but thought the more. He saw it as more than possible that Finnigan had been poisoned in exactly the same way as Horniman.

Other thoughts conflicted. He wanted to see the wounded man, who had been taken to a doctor in a nearby street. As far as he had been able to find out, the man was not badly hurt, and quite fit enough to be questioned.

Meanwhile, the prisoner stood sullenly on one side.

The sergeant turned to him. 'You know what *this* means, don't you?' he demanded.

The prisoner said: '*I* didn't kill him, if that's what you mean. You'd better look for his woman.'

'A woman?' asked the sergeant. 'You mean to say there's a woman in this?'

'There was a woman with him before *I* came. She went out in such a hurry she left the door open. I was going to consult him about—' he hesitated.

‘The right way to fire a revolver?’ asked Rollison, pleasantly.

The man glowered. ‘*Very* funny.’

The sergeant began to ask routine questions, but Rollison was on edge to get away. Soon an inspector from the station arrived. He at once telephoned for the police surgeon, who, after a brief survey, said that Dr Finnigan had been poisoned.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before a breathless young man appeared. At sight of Finnigan’s body he drew back with an exclamation of shock and incredulity.

Rollison watched him with keen curiosity.

The young man said: ‘What—what’s happened?’

‘I’m afraid it’s a case of murder, Dr Smith,’ said the inspector. ‘You’re Dr Finnigan’s partner, aren’t you?’

‘Yes. I was with friends, and was told—’ Smith broke off, looking towards a cabinet which was fastened to the wall. In it were several dozen small bottles, all neatly labelled. The door was swinging open. Smith moved towards it quickly, ran his gaze along the shelves, and then said in a tense voice: ‘The barbiturate’s gone.’

He looked down at Finnigan, and said helplessly: ‘It’s fantastic! Who on earth …’ then his voice trailed off.

There would not be a great deal to learn here, thought Rollison. The inspector asked him for a statement, and he gave it briefly. Higginbottom, he said, had followed a suspect to this house, seen a man break in, and had telephoned him. The inspector took his word for it, and asked whether he had anything to suggest.

‘I’d like to see the wounded man,’ Rollison said, promptly.

‘What’s this about a wounded man?’ The inspector was startled.

The sergeant interposed. ‘He’s being brought round, sir,’ he said. ‘I’ve seen to it.’ There was a wealth of resentment in his voice. The prisoner, who had refused to give his name or to say anything except to deny that he had killed Finnigan, was searched. He had no papers with him, and nothing to identify him.

Then the wounded man was brought in.

He was a youngish, good-looking fellow, deathly pale now, his arm in a sling. He was trembling as he entered the room, and the inspector told him to sit down. He did so with evident

relief. The inspector glanced at Rollison, then at the man, and finally asked in a friendly voice:

'Now, what's it all about? What's your name?'

'K—K—Kent,' stammered the man. 'J—J—Jim Kent. I—'

Immediately, Rollison seemed to hear a high-pitched scream, and to see a peroxided girl sitting against the wall. This began to make sense, and he listened intently.

Kent's story was plausible enough. He had suspected his wife of having an affair with Dr Finnigan. Friends had told him that she often called on the doctor, and he had been waiting to confront her that night, but he swore that she had not been near the doctor's house.

He must have seen his wife arrive and depart. Rollison thought, and he admired the man for his loyalty towards her. The story seemed to satisfy the inspector, who said briefly: 'All right, Kent. We'll have to hold you for a little while, but you know that.'

Rollison said briskly: 'If there's nothing else you want me for. Inspector, I'll be off.'

He hurried to the end of the street, where he had left his car, and drove at once to Gresham Terrace. On the way, he found himself thinking about Kent's story; he liked the man as much as he disliked the one who had fired the shots. There was now no doubt in his mind that the sullen prisoner had tried to shoot Kent, perhaps to prevent him from telling his story, perhaps to prevent him from mentioning his wife's visit.

Had Ethel Kent poisoned Finnigan?

Rollison left the car outside his flat and hurried upstairs. He had a sneaking fear that Snub might not have returned, but there he was, his eagerness completely at variance with Jolly's composure. He had been waiting on tenterhooks for an hour, he declared, and Jolly nodded confirmation. So Snub had come straight to the flat.

'Well, what happened?' asked Rollison.

'I've told you most of it,' said Snub. 'Bright-eyes went to the doctor's house after a visit to the Lenwells, but she wasn't there long.'

'How did she get in?'

'She had a key. Trust Bright-eyes. No picking locks for her! What's *your* report?'

Rollison laughed. ‘Interesting, but it can wait. This quarrel between the man inside the house and the girl: did you hear much of it?’

‘Nothing, except the raised voices,’ Snub said.

Rollison said resignedly: ‘I suppose we shouldn’t expect too much.’ Briefly he told them what had happened at Notting Hill, then added: ‘You go to the Lenwells’ house, Snub, and see the woman. Ask her why Bright-eyes visited her. Don’t threaten, but cajole. Let’s see what you can do when there’s some finesse needed.’

‘That’s me,’ said Snub. ‘Born to it!’

‘You got pretty close to a gun,’ Rollison reminded him.

‘Oh, I’m bullet-proof,’ said Snub, and hurried out.

Rollison looked into Jolly’s eyes, and then said slowly: ‘I think we’ll have to check up on him.’

It was disturbing to have to reckon with the possibility of betrayal in his own camp. He still thought it unlikely, but the uncertainty worried him.

He left the flat and hurried to Bethnal Green. After some difficulty, he found the Kent’s flat. It was in an old house, overlooked by the high, brooding chimneys of a factory. He rang the bell and prepared to wait.

At long last, the door opened.

‘Who is it?’ asked Ethel Kent.

‘I’m sure you remember me,’ said Rollison gently. ‘May I come in?’

It was obvious to him that she was frightened. Her voice, her manner, both told him that she did not know whether to let him in or not. He was prepared to be firm about it when a door opened upstairs and a woman called out fretfully: ‘Who *is* it, for heaven’s sake!’

The voice was Jane Lenwell’s.

Chapter Thirteen

Three Ladies

Rollison took Ethel's arm and led her up the stairs. Jane Lenwell leaned over the banisters peering down on them. Not until they were on the landing did she recognise Rollison, and then she gave a dramatic gasp.

'Good evening,' said Rollison pleasantly. 'Will you lead the way?'

Mrs Lenwell obeyed, walking unsteadily. There was about her a strong smell of alcohol, and on a table in the attractively furnished room to which she led him, a half empty bottle of whisky.

Mrs Lenwell went to a chair and collapsed.

Ethel looked hard at Rollison. If she had been frightened when at his flat, she was more frightened now, and not, he thought, because he had called. There, on the table next to the whisky, was a single sheet of paper. Rollison picked it up. There was no heading, no signature, only the hammer impression, and the words: *'You know what to expect, don't you?'*

Rollison asked softly: 'Do you know, Ethel?'

She shivered.

Mrs Lenwell sobbed: 'Of course she knows!'

'And yet the Hammer is well-liked down here, isn't he?'

'Not by—not by *all* of us,' said Ethel, with a catch in her breath. She went to a chair and sat down, wearily. 'Stop it, Jane,' she said to Mrs Lenwell, 'it won't do any good going on like that, and *you* haven't had the letter.'

'He—might pick on me!'

'And he might not,' said Ethel. She looked at Rollison. 'I was going to give you a ring,' she said. 'I got that note an hour ago, Mr Rollison. It scared the guts out of me. They must know I let you see that first message.'

Rollison thought of Snub. 'Who could have told them?' he asked.

‘I don’t know, but there isn’t much they don’t find out.’ She moved her hands restlessly, and went on: ‘But I don’t think there’s anything you can do. I don’t think there’s anything *anyone* can do. I wouldn’t mind so much if it was only me—’ she broke off.

‘Who else?’ asked Rollison.

‘It’s her husband,’ moaned Jane Lenwell. ‘He went out before dark and he hasn’t come back.’

‘You needn’t worry about him, Ethel,’ Rollison said firmly.

Ethel jumped up, and clutched his arm. There was a new hope in her eyes, and he knew that until that moment she had taken it for granted that her husband was in great danger, even, perhaps, dead.

‘Your husband’s quite safe,’ he assured her. ‘He was hurt a little but not badly. And, he’s very loyal to you, Ethel.’

‘What—what do you mean?’

Rollison said bluntly: ‘He saw you visit Dr Finnigan tonight. He did not tell the police. He was injured by another visitor, a man whose name we don’t yet know.’

Ethel’s face blanched.

‘He—he knew!’ screeched Mrs Lenwell.

‘That his wife often went to Finnigan’s?’ said Rollison. ‘Yes, he knew that, and wanted to find out why she went. Why *did* you go to Finnigan’s house so often, Ethel?’

Rollison wished that Jane Lenwell was not in the room; she might influence the other girl not to speak freely; but of the two, Ethel was the stronger character. The news had shocked her, but she was recovering. She said slowly: ‘I had to. The Hammer told me to take messages to him. I don’t know what was in them. I couldn’t help myself.’

‘Did the Hammer persuade you to visit me in the same way?’ asked Rollison.

‘Yes, but I only did one job,’ she went on, and there was a despairing note in her voice. ‘It was before I met Jim. I drove a car. I didn’t know it was for a robbery. When a window was smashed I just lost my head and drove off, and—since then I’ve had to do what the Hammer wanted. Jim—you don’t know Jim,’ she added. ‘If he thought I had done anything like that, it would be all over between us.’ She caught her breath: ‘How did he find out?’

‘People talk,’ Rollison said.

‘Damn their lying tongues!’ cried Ethel. ‘Well, that’s all. I used to get orders from Finnigan. They were always the same. I was to scream and make a distraction. After I’d come away from you tonight I decided to finish with it all, I went to tell Jane and then I went to see Finnigan. We had a row. He told me that when the Hammer gave orders they had to be obeyed. I told him flatly that I *wouldn’t* obey any more … but I would have done,’ she added, pathetically, ‘I wouldn’t have been able to stand up to him on my own.’

‘Was Finnigan all right when you left?’

She stared. ‘Quite all right. Why do you ask?’

Rollison told her, watching her and Jane Lenwell closely. Jane threw up her hands, and immediately began to moan, while Ethel’s eyes widened.

She said quietly: ‘So they think I killed him.’

‘They may do,’ Rollison said. ‘Though I’m not sure that they know you were there, but Jim knew.’

‘And said—nothing.’

‘Not a word about you.’

Her eyes shone. ‘Even though he knows I might—’

‘Yes,’ Rollison said. ‘What are you going to do about it?’

‘I don’t know,’ she said. ‘Will you … advise me?’

‘Advice is more usually asked for than taken,’ said Rollison dryly, ‘But if you really want it, I suggest that you go to the police immediately and tell them everything you know about the Hammer. They’ll see that you come to no harm.’

Ethel said quietly: ‘You’re right, of course. It’s strange how one sees it all so clearly in the end—when it’s almost too late. But I’ll do what you say.’

‘Good girl!’ said Rollison, warmly. ‘Telephone Scotland Yard, and ask for Superintendent Grice. Give him my name and tell him I think he would be wise to come here at once. Will you do that?’

She nodded.

But before Grice arrived Rollison had time to hear Jane Lenwell’s story.

She had believed in Horniman, and for a long time did whatever he told her; nothing had been even vaguely criminal at first. Then, twelve months before, there had been talk of the

Hammer. She said that she believed Horniman was frightened of him. He was always nervous when the name 'Hammer' was mentioned. This seemed odd to her, for she had heard that the Hammer was supposed to be a benefactor to the people of the East End.

'I didn't know the real truth about the Hammer until Ethel told me,' declared Jane Lenwell, her voice taking on a note of whining complaint. 'She told me about the smash-and-grab and what he made her do, and then I knew why Horniman was so scared of him.'

'How did you meet Mrs Kent?' asked Rollison.

Both women stared at him, and Jane exclaimed: 'Didn't you know *that*? We're sisters. Well, half-sisters.'

Ethel said: 'Jane did well for herself and I didn't see much of her until she was in trouble.' There was no malice in the words, it was a simple statement of fact. 'She was worried about Horniman and the Hammer, and so we got together.'

Rollison looked at Jane.

'What did you do for Horniman?'

'I got snippets of news in the papers about his companies, and the social side, he just wanted to build up a reputation. That's all I ever did, I swear it is!'

'Didn't he tell you to spread the story that he was married?'

'Yes, but I didn't,' said Jane. 'My husband wouldn't let me. He had no time for Horniman. It was my money I put into the company, not his.'

'What did you think Horniman meant when he said that he would handle Susan Lancaster?' asked Rollison, curiously.

'Why, that he'd get her to marry him,' said Jane Lenwell. She broke off, helplessly.

Rollison believed that she had told him all she could, and that Ethel would not go back on her word. He drove his car into a side street, and waited until Grice arrived.

Grice was only there for a quarter of an hour; both women were with him when he left.

Rollison pulled at the self-starter. There remained one woman whom he had not questioned but who might be implicated: Mrs Willis, *alias* Drayton's 'Mother'. He knew her address, and he drove towards Chelsea at a good pace.

He was not surprised to see a plain clothes man on duty

outside. Grice was taking no chances.

It was past midnight, but there were lights in the downstairs rooms, and when Rollison rang, a maid answered the door.

She would see whether Mrs Willis were at home, she said.

Rollison waited for a few minutes in the spacious hall. The contrast between this house and the less luxurious one of the Kents was striking. Grice had said that Mrs Willis was wealthy, and here was ample evidence of it.

How well had she known Horniman?

Did she know of the Hammer?

The maid came out of a room on the left. 'Mrs Willis can see you now, sir.'

She led Rollison to a large drawing-room, furnished with the same unostentatious luxury as the hall. Mrs Willis was lying back in a comfortable chair with a book on her lap. She put it aside and stood up to greet him. In the soft light of the room, she looked not only well-groomed, but beautiful. She smiled up at him with quiet composure.

'Isn't this rather late for a call?' she asked. 'And haven't I seen you before?'

'At Bournemouth, probably,' said Rollison. 'You were with Colonel Horniman. I am a friend of Miss Lancaster's.'

'Then I think I know why you have come,' she said.

'That helps,' smiled Rollison.

'And I am glad that you are here,' she told him. 'I would rather tell you than the police.'

Rollison said: 'The police may have to know.'

'I understand that. But please sit down.' She waved towards a chair. 'I have been very worried for a long time,' she went on, 'but I have much less to fear now that Horniman is dead.'

She smiled. 'Of course, I know that gives me a motive for murdering him, and I think I might have done, had I had the courage. But it is easier to talk of murder than to do it. To be brief, Mr Rollison, Colonel Horniman had been blackmailing me for a long time. He forced me to invest money in this new company that he was forming, and he forced me to see Miss Lancaster and pretend to be Mrs Drayton. It was useless to protest. I had reached a state of mind when I did what he told me. Provided I did that, he left me alone.'

'Considerate of him,' murmured Rollison.

‘As for his death—’ she shrugged her shoulders. ‘A blackmailer plays a dangerous game. It’s always on the cards that one of his victims can stand it no longer, and takes the law into his own hands.’ She raised and dropped her own expressively.

‘He had a fairly strong hold over you, Mrs Willis, to make you quite so subservient,’ Rollison suggested.

‘A *very* strong hold.’

She stubbed out her cigarette, poured out two whiskies, and handed him a glass, drinking the contents of her own rather too quickly.

‘A *very* strong hold,’ she repeated. ‘I have three children, Mr Rollison. I am devoted to them. I was never married,’

Rollison sipped his whisky.

She said lightly. ‘You will not need details. The fact is self-explanatory. None of my children suspect the truth, I do not want to bastardise them. If you force me to—’ she paused.

Rollison said: ‘The police will uncover all the information they can, of course, but I think a word from me will help to satisfy them. But I, myself, must be fully satisfied first. I’m sorry.’

She looked at him gravely.

‘What else do you want to know?’

Rollison disliked this task intensely, but made himself go on.

‘The police will not be interested in your private affairs unless at any time they crossed the dividing line between the lawful and the unlawful.’

She smiled. ‘I have done nothing criminal, and Horniman had the sense to realise that it would be a waste of time asking me to. All the money I have was settled on me by Mr Willis during his lifetime. He left the rest of his possessions to the children. What else might the police think? Bigamy, perhaps? No, it is all painfully, distressingly straightforward. We were unable to marry.’

Rollison said: ‘Thank you.’

‘Are you satisfied?’

‘Yes. But the police will want to know all your dealings with Horniman.’

‘I have already told them,’ she said. ‘I “invested” in every new company. I pretended to be Mrs Drayton. That is all.’

‘Do you know why he wanted you to act that part?’

She said quietly: ‘Horniman told me that he wanted the girl convinced that her fiancé was alive. There seemed no harm in that. And I—’ she paused, stood up, and flung her cigarette away, she had grown pale. ‘Of course there was harm in it! It tortured her, or made her liable to torture. I wish I had not cheated her. I know now how she loves Drayton.’

‘Is he dead?’ asked Rollison.

‘I don’t know. Horniman didn’t tell me that; only what he wanted me to say to the girl. You see, now, why I’m glad that he’s dead.’

‘Others may take up where he left off,’ Rollison murmured.

She stiffened. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Others may blackmail you.’

She shivered. ‘Yes,’ she said, heavily. ‘Yes, of course. I have been telling myself since I saw the police that it was all over, but—’

‘It can be,’ said Rollison.

She said: ‘I have guarded my children from the truth all their lives and I am going to go on guarding them, whatever it costs. If money can keep the secret, the secret will be kept. You must forgive me if I sound melodramatic.’

‘If you are approached again, you can try a different cure,’ Rollison said,

‘And what is that?

‘Try me.’

She toyed with her glass.

‘I think you mean that,’ she said.

‘I do. Because I think that whoever killed Horniman may have killed Bruce Drayton, and I am fond of Susan. Will you tell me if anyone else does attempt to blackmail you? Now or later … if I can help when Susan’s affair is settled, it will be repaying a debt. Now! Who else do you know among Horniman’s friends?’

‘I knew only Jane Lenwell. Poor Jane!’

‘Poor Jane?’

‘She has a guilty secret, too,’ said Mrs Willis, and there was an edge to her laugh. ‘Not infidelity. Nothing that would worry a normal woman, but there is Jewish blood in her veins and she has a morbid terror of it becoming known. Not the least of the evil Hitler left behind him.’

‘I see,’ said Rollison. ‘And Horniman used that to influence her, did he?’ It sounded probable, and it would be in character.

‘Yes. But I think she rather liked the man.’

‘So I gathered. Do you know her husband?’

‘I’ve met him. I don’t think very much of him,’ said Mrs Willis, ‘but he is not quite so much under Jane’s thumb as he likes to make out when in public. He’s a little perverted, I think.’ She laughed, without humour. ‘I *am* being frank, aren’t I?’

‘It’s what is needed. There’s too much confusion, too many half truths. In what way is he perverted?’

‘He takes pleasure in taunting her with her guilty secret,’ said Mrs Willis. ‘Usually it’s when he’s drunk. He’s one of the men whom drink makes cruel. Yet she’s fond of him,’ she added, ‘in some ways they’re devoted. I’ve known Jane for a long time.’

‘I see,’ said Rollison. ‘And you know none of the others?’

‘None at all.’

‘Has Horniman always dealt personally with you?’

‘He once sent a little round-shouldered man to collect some money,’ said Mrs Willis. ‘Is there anything else?’

‘Just one more thing,’ Rollison said, and took a pencil from his pocket and a visiting card. He sketched a hammer, then showed it to her.

‘Do you recognise that?’

She laughed rather helplessly. ‘No. Should I?’

‘If you ever get a letter signed in that way, telephone me at once,’ said Rollison.

‘I will,’ she promised, and he rose to go.

The sergeant outside wished him good night.

Rollison sat in the Talbot for a few minutes, smoking. The woman had charm, it might almost be said that she cast a kind of spell. She had strength of character, too.

He drove to Gresham Terrace, and the door was opened as he walked up the stairs. He prepared to greet Jolly, but instead saw the face of Higginbottom. It was looking rather plaintive.

‘Jolly is still out,’ he said, ‘but what news he has gleaned will be the same as mine. You did send him after me didn’t you? I’m sorry you thought it necessary.’

‘Oh,’ said Rollison.

Snub went on gravely, ‘Sergeant Barrow turned up. Questions

here and questions there. Also, a friend told me today that the police had been asking him about me. Unease at Scotland Yard is one thing, and can be taken fairly tranquilly, but unease at Gresham Terrace … well.'

Rollison said: 'Yes, of course. On the other hand, if you take a detached view you'll admit that it's necessary. Odd things are happening. Much of the information coming through here is highly confidential. And there was the little matter of the pillar box,'

Snub stared. 'The *pillar* box?'

Rollison told him the story of the suspected raid on the pillar box.

'A little far-fetched, don't you think?' Snub said coldly. Rollison replied that where the Hammer were concerned, nothing was really far-fetched.

'I suppose I've got to admit that it *is* possible,' conceded Snub. 'Still, to know one's under surveillance rather cramps one's style. Have you any direct suspicion?'

'Only on one count.'

Snub gulped. 'Let's have it,' he invited.

'Someone knew that Ethel Kent had been to Finnigan's house. By "someone", I mean the Hammer. You were there.'

After a long pause, Snub said stiffly: 'I caught a bus at the end of Bray Street and got off at Piccadilly. I didn't speak to a soul, except the bus conductor, and he wasn't chatty. That's gospel. After all, a *lot* of people might have seen her go in. I mean, there were watching eyes, weren't there?'

'Yes,' said Rollison, and added gently: 'Snub, if I thought you were up to any funny business, you wouldn't be sitting there.'

A gleam shone in Snub's eyes.

'Well, I *am* all right, you know. Apart from any natural foolishness that is. I agree you'll have to keep a look-out, but you needn't.' He grinned.

Rollison grinned back. 'Well, let's shelve it for the nonce, shall we. There are a few notes I would like taken down.' He sat back, the tips of his fingers together and his eyes half-closed, letting his thoughts roam, going over everything he had heard, giving emphasis to those things which he thought might prove important later. Snub's pencil flew over the lined pages of his note-book. Suddenly the quiet was broken by a crash of

breaking glass.

Snub was nearer the door; he reached it ahead of Rollison, sped across the hall, and flung the kitchen door open.

His voice, pitched high with incredulity and a little disappointment in that no villain had been discovered, came back sharply to Rollison.

'Someone's thrown something through the window. It *looks* like a hammer!'

Chapter Fourteen

Rollison Goes East

It was a hammer.

Rollison took out a handkerchief, wrapped it round his fingers and picked it up. Snub was now on the iron landing of the fire escape. One pane of glass was broken and pieces of it were all over the kitchen floor. There was no sound outside, and Snub came back, disappointed again.

'That was an odd thing to do, wasn't it?'

'Just a message,' said Rollison.

Snub's eyes widened. 'Of course, the *Hammer*! Do the police really think there is such a man?'

'They know there is. But I shouldn't think the Hammer has had much to do with this job,' Rollison said. 'The hint is much too broad. Nice little tool,' he added, swinging it, 'It would look well on the wall, don't you think?'

'Jolly wouldn't think so,' said Snub.

Rollison chuckled. 'Give Grice a ring at the Yard and tell him about it, will you? If he's not there, leave a message. And then get off to bed. You can type those notes out in the morning.'

Grice was not at Scotland Yard, which was hardly surprising, for it was well past midnight. Snub went off, and Rollison wondered again whether Grice had other grounds for suspecting Snub than those he had listed.

At a quarter to one, as he was about to switch off the light in his bedroom, Jolly came in.

His whisper, muted yet determined to be heard, sped across the room. 'Are you awake, sir?'

'Yes, come in.' Rollison sat up in bed and watched the prim figure of his factotum with affectionate amusement. Jolly looked tired. It occurred to Rollison, almost with a sense of shock, that Jolly was getting old … well, oldish. The thought was hardly in his mind before he asked abruptly:

'Are things here too much for you? Do I work you too hard?'

‘Not at all, sir, but I do admit to feeling rather tired lately. That is one reason why I am extremely glad that Mr Higginbottom is—may I say, *promising*?’

‘Sit down,’ said Rollison, and when Jolly did so, he went on slowly: ‘Are you still quite satisfied with Snub?’

‘Well, yes, although he *did* find out that I was following him rather quickly. It was an unlucky chance, really, sir. He was calling at one street door, and I was outside the range of light from that, when another opened and the hall lamp shone fully on my face. He guessed why I was there and I admitted he was right. I thought it better not to pretend.’

‘He told me about it.’

‘I have no doubt that he took it philosophically.’

‘He did,’ said Rollison. ‘He said he’d made four calls in the wake of Lenwell, not Mrs Lenwell. Is that right?’

‘Yes, sir. He learned that Mrs Lenwell was out – I overheard his conversation with the husband – and he waited, quite properly, in the street, as Mr Lenwell had said that she might be back at any time. When Lenwell left, he followed him. I think that was natural enough in the circumstances, if a little divergent from his instructions. I think I would have done the same, sir.’

‘Probably,’ said Rollison, gravely.

‘And at one place, where he went in, he learned that the people on whom Lenwell was calling were the subscribers to Horniman’s new company. Further – and I have checked this, sir – Lenwell seems greatly alarmed lest the money should be lost, and he made the calls to enlist the support of the others in a demand that it be made a first charge on Horniman’s estate. So the night was not entirely unproductive, sir, and one call *did* strike me as being a little odd.’

‘Where was that?’ asked Rollison.

‘The Hammer Club, sir,’ said Jolly, ‘off Shepherd’s Market. It is a comparatively new club. Lenwell was there only for half an hour. I was not able to get in, but he came away looking rather troubled, I thought, sir. From there he went straight to his home, and his wife let him in. I wonder if the name of the club is a coincidence, sir?’

‘So do I,’ said Rollison. He threw back the bedclothes and went into the hall, lifting up the telephone and dialling Scotland

Yard, explaining, while he waited for the call, enough to enable Jolly to understand why he was so interested.

A bright-voiced man at the other end said that if Mr Rollison recommended it, he had no doubt that the Hammer Club would be given special attention. All he knew about it was that it had only recently been opened. Inspector Ridgley, who handled the clubs, was not in; would Mr Rollison like him to ring back?

'In the morning will do,' Rollison said, 'provided you give me the credit for prompt information.'

'You needn't worry about that, sir!'

'Thanks,' said Rollison, 'Good night.' He replaced the receiver and smiled at Jolly. 'Bed seems a good idea,' he said. 'We'll hammer it out in the morning!'

Jolly smiled, only faintly approving.

Rollison was astir early next morning when Snub arrived, complete with sheaves of paper on which were typed Rollison's notes of the previous night.

'He's trying to make himself indispensable,' Rollison thought. 'I wish that pillar box—'

The front-door bell rang.

Rollison finished his coffee as Grice came in.

'Why, good morning, to you,' said Rollison, standing up, 'Breakfast? Or, for friendship's sake, a cup of fresh coffee?' Grice accepted a cigarette.

'Thanks,' he said.

'What's the trouble? – for there appears to be one.'

Grice gave a short laugh. 'I've just had an interview with Meredith. Be warned, Rolly. A specially dictated memo is going to all ranks *and* all divisional stations. General line of the memo: "Beware all amateurs in detection from the highest to the lowest". The only thing left out is your name.'

'And after all I've done,' mourned Rollison. 'I even made you a present of Ethel Kent and her story. Would you have got as far as that so soon, by yourselves?'

'I doubt it. *And* I told Meredith so.' He looked at Snub. 'Barrow came to see you last night, didn't he?'

'Yes,' said Snub shortly.

'One day I will break that man's neck,' said Grice, with such feeling that Rollison laughed. 'No, it isn't funny. He should have

been out doing something else, not wasting his time here. His trouble is that he's had so many lucky breaks that he thinks he can do no wrong. I've caught him out in three deliberate omissions: three orders he just hasn't carried out because he considered he had something better to do. I've had an interview with *him,* too,' he added, darkly.

'My turn now,' murmured Snub.

Grice said: 'I've never made a secret of the fact that I think it was ill-advised of Mr Rollison to employ you in the middle of this affair,' he said, 'and you know that I have been making inquiries about you. They're all answered now. There are no grounds for suspicion.'

Snub put a hand on his heart. 'A guaranteed blameless life!' he cried. 'An unsolicited gift from Scotland Yard! Just think of that! If I can ever do the same for you, just say the word.'

Rollison said: 'This is all very encouraging, Bill. What's opened your heart to Snub?'

'I think you and he ought to know where he stands,' said Grice. 'At the same time, both of you must realise that after today's memo, you won't get any co-operation from anyone at the Yard or at the divisional stations. They can't disobey orders. You'll have to watch your step,' he added, 'and this at a time when *you,* Rolly, could be more useful than you've ever been before.'

'And that's saying something,' said Snub, feelingly.

Grice laughed. 'I'm worried to death about the Hammer. Conflicting stories still continue to pour in. He's Santa Claus, he's a murderer; he won't touch violence, he uses his hammer *ad lib*; he only carries a hammer with him, he carries a gun and a knife. The only things on which everyone is agreed are his cleverness and the excellence of his organisation. I've been reading the most up-to-date report on the gentleman. Apparently he hides somewhere in the East End, and most of his messages are carried by children still of school age. Now and again he uses people like Ethel Kent, always when he has something on them, but that only started twelve months ago. He began with the children.'

Grice paused, and Snub rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

'We just can't get a line on him. And when the East End decides to act like an oyster, I only know one person who might

prise it open.' He paused. 'And that's you, Rolly. You've more friends there than all the police put together. Will you have a shot at it?'

'Yes,' said Rollison, promptly.

'Knowing that you'll be watched with suspicion by our people?'

'That has happened before, you know! I have even known the great Superintendent Grice to cast aspersions. I'll gladly have a go. In fact, it's on the agenda for the day. But before I do …'

'Yes?'

'Ethel Kent?' murmured Rollison.

'Personally, I don't think she killed Finnigan,' said Grice, 'but that doesn't rule out the possibility. She had no poison and no hypo on her person, in her flat, or at any of the places where she goes regularly. Nor had the man who did the shooting in Bray Street, more's the pity. He won't talk at all,' Grice added. 'There was none of the stuff in the surgery. If Ethel Kent didn't kill him, then someone else was there last night. The best bet seemed Dr Smith, his partner, but Smith was with friends all the evening. The murder was done only a little while before you got there, and *after* Ethel Kent had left, if she is telling the truth. Did you see anyone else go in, Higginbottom?'

'No, but there's a back door.'

'Yes, there is indeed. One of Meredith's complaints is that you went there without first telling us, Rolly. Had we known, he says, the place would have been watched back and front.'

'It's more than evident that Meredith's getting under your skin, Bill,' Rollison said with a grin. 'He's got reason for being uppish, you know. If I'd given you Ethel Kent's name and address, she might never have gone to Finnigan's last night. I feel some responsibility for the girl. I've even got some ideas about her.'

'Such as?'

Rollison half-closed his eyes. 'She came here, under instructions, and I talked to her, and obviously the Hammer's people knew that she had had time to talk to me. I think, once they knew that, they intended to incriminate her. Her husband too. Further, Finnigan was probably making trouble, and they wanted him out of the way. All a bit wholesale, I admit, but I think these are probabilities. A nice neat job would be: kill

Finnigan, send Ethel to the place to quarrel with him first, establishing a motive against her. Send the man who won't give his name, the gunman, to make sure it all happened to order. Give him instructions to prevent Kent from getting away alive. Oh, and Kent had to be sent there, to spy on his wife. He'd go if a rumour were passed on to him. Am I clear?'

'No,' said Grice, 'but I see what you're driving at. It suggests that Kent knows something.'

Rollison murmured: 'Yes. What's his record?'

'Good. Steady fellow, a waiter at the Hammer Club. The Club's about the average for a London night club, run by a man named Benson. Horniman knew Benson, who put five thousand pounds into the new company, but Benson *seems* all right. I know what you're going to say,' went on Grice. 'There's an obvious connection, as Kent works there, but *I* can't see how it ties up with an attempt to kill.'

'Easy,' said Rollison.

'Go on,' said Grice, grimly.

'My dear chap, what worries the Hammer most of all? What is the one thing which shows his weakness? His extreme caution. He always wears a mask. He sends little children or blackmailed victims to run his messages. He covers himself very cleverly indeed, but someone must have seen him as he is. If he patronises the Hammer Club, who would be most likely to see him? The staff. Hence, Kent, Q.E.D.,' he added, gently.

Snub whispered: 'Of *course*!'

'There's probably something in that,' admitted Grice, 'although I hadn't seen it before. Kent swears that he knows nothing.'

'He may not know that he knows, and still be dangerous,' Rollison paused, then went on: 'The same thing happened with Susan Lancaster, you know. Why did they try to kill her? The reasonable supposition is that she knows something vital to them without realising the significance. And like it or not, these things *are* all connected.'

Grice shrugged. 'You may be right, you probably are, but meanwhile what did Mrs Willis have to say last night?'

Rollison looked at Snub. 'This isn't for your tender ears, I'm afraid, and I don't think it directly affects the case. Fade out.'

When Snub had left the room Rollison told Grice what Mrs

Willis had told him, and Grice promised to get the story checked at once; if Mrs Willis was accurate in every detail, there would be no need for any official action, he said. Grice left the flat soon afterwards, leaving Rollison with one major question in his mind.

Why had Grice been so frank with Snub?

Had he felt so angry with Meredith and Barrow that he had decided to take an opposite line? Or had he wanted to disarm Snub, and by so doing give him a spurious sense of security?

Whitechapel Road was thronged on that bright September morning. Costers' barrows were doing a thriving trade, while the pavements were thronged with those of every class and nationality.

Rollison felt as if he had come home.

All his early adventures had been in this part of London. The dirt and squalor, the flashy brightness, the more than a suspicion that every other man he passed was a law-breaker, had exerted a fascination which had never really left him. Rollison smiled at himself at this last youthful misconception. Then an ugly face or a stealthy movement had seemed to spell 'crime' but he had soon realised that the majority of these people were as honest, as straightforward, as any in London. The difficulty had been in getting them to trust him.

That there were more petty criminals here than in other districts had soon become established. But there was crime and crime. The East End paid tribute to a distinct set of morals, a definite code in which violence, and crimes of meanness, held little part. Few would betray such criminals but none would actively help them.

After a while it had been borne upon them that Rollison, nicknamed the Toff, whom many had sneered at as an interfering, sensation-seeker, was prepared to ignore the petty crimes, the book-maker's tout, the men who served a few drinks after hours. Gradually, after many misunderstandings, a new respect had crept into their voices when discussing the Toff. So his reputation had been built up, grudgingly at first, then with a certain admiration. If rogues of high order – blackmailers, murderers and their like – were the Toff's quarry, so be it. They not only heaved sighs of relief but were, on occasion, prepared

to give him a hint here and there. There came a time when many had cause to be grateful to him. One of those was Bill Ebbutt, who kept the *Lion* in the Whitechapel Road. The corrugated-iron gymnasium behind it had been the chopping block for many a hapless but hopeful boxer, and the training ground for many who had championships in their fists.

It was to this gymnasium Rollison was driving, and as he sighted the painted board marked: 'BILL'S BOXING ACADEMY', he drew up his car with a chuckle of satisfaction. The doors were open, and he could hear the thud of gloves on unyielding bodies, and a monotonous voice chanting: 'Mind yer chin—mind yer belly—use yer left—wotjer fink yer've got a right 'and for?'

An old warrior, with wrinkled face and cauliflower ears wearing a choker, and a narrow-brimmed bowler on the back of his head, looked out. He stared without enthusiasm at the car.

Rollison called out: 'Is Bill inside?'

The answer came back grudgingly: 'Wotjer want 'im for?'

'Oh, just a chat,' said Rollison. 'How are you keeping, Flatty?'

Flatty came up to the car and peered short-sightedly into Rollison's face. Then a grin seemed to spread from ear to ear, and a misshapen hand shot out.

'Strike me pink, if it isn't Mr Ar!'

'I'm glad I'm not forgotten,' said Rollison, with real pleasure.

'Take an 'ell of a long time ter forget *you,* Mr Ar!' declared Flatty. 'Bill won't arf be glad ter see yer. I'll go an' tell 'im yer've come.'

'Let me spring it on him,' pleaded Rollison.

'Okey-doke. But I'll come wiv' yer.'

The outside of the *Lion* was freshly painted. Inside the walls were hung with sporting prints. A young woman with peroxided hair built up into a pyramid of brassy contortions was leaning against the bar.

'Where's Bill?' Flatty demanded.

'Busy,' said the barmaid, shortly.

''E ain't so busy as all that,' declared Flatty. 'Get a move on, Marlene, an' tell 'im a gent wants ter see 'im.' He chuckled throatily, 'Tell 'im I say 'e's got to come.'

'Fancy yourself, don't you?' demanded Marlene.

'Any more lip fiom you, me gal, an' I'll do wot yer muvver

ought've done wen you was a nipper,' declared Flatty. 'Saucy bit o' stuff,' he growled, as the girl flounced off. 'Fings 'ave changed, Mr Ar, and not for the better.'

The girl came back and settled down to polishing her nails. Behind her loomed the fattest man Rollison had ever remembered seeing.

'Nar wot—' he began, and then he saw Rollison. He paused. He gulped. He gasped: 'Gor Blimey if it isn't Mr Ar! Well, I never did!' He stretched out a mighty hand which easily engulfed Rollison's. 'It warms the cockles of me 'eart ter see yer, Mr Ar,' declared Bill Ebbutt. 'Where'd yer spring from? I fought yer'd given us up, dropped us like an 'ot potato.'

'Is it as long as that since I've been here, Bill?'

'It's too long by 'alf, but come in, Mr Ar, come in … Marlene, draw three pints. No, I'm jiggered if I won't draw 'em meself!'

In high delight, he drew the three pints and carried them into the back parlour, a small, dark, spotless room, hung with enlarged photographs of boxers and wedding groups.

Bill seemed unable to stop talking. Rollison slipped in a few questions: how was Mrs Ebbutt, how were 'the boys' getting along, what champions had Bill got up his sleeve. To all of these Bill returned enthusiastic answers, and promised that his wife should be fetched before the Toff had gone.

'She's abaht the same,' he declared. 'Still singing 'er 'ymns, but she ain't got me ter put on "Harmy" uniform *yet,* Mr Ar.' And he enlarged upon the religious activities of his spouse while Flatty sat back in a corner and drank deeply.

At last Ebbutt stopped his flow of reminiscences and grinned with a set of teeth of such startling whiteness that would put to shame the snowy wastes of the frozen north.

'Well, Mr Ar, yer don't 'ave to tell me yer *want* somefink. Anyfink I can do to 'elp, yer've only got to say the word, but yer oughter know that.'

'I do,' said Rollison, who was really affected by the warmth of this welcome, and more than a little shame-faced, because Bill Ebbutt knew that he had come only for help and information. 'A gentle whisper's reached me, Bill, about a man called the Hammer. Do you know him?'

Flatty put down his glass very quietly, while an extraordinary change came over Ebbutt's face.

Chapter Fifteen

Talk of the Hammer

Bill Ebbutt said that he would like to tell Mr Rollison a story. Was Mr Rollison in a hurry? The fact that he used the Toff's full name was indicative of his frame of mind. He was preparing the way to say 'no'. That in itself was surprising, for Bill was not a man to refuse information, even to the police, about the more violent type of criminal; and it appeared that the Hammer was violent enough, or he would not have travelled armed.

'No, I'm not in a hurry,' Rollison said.

'Tell yer wot,' said Bill, 'we'll 'ave a bite to eat. We still manige a rahnd o' roast beef and two veg, Mr Ar. Okay by you?'

'Just right,' agreed Rollison.

Flatty went off to give the order, and while he was gone, Bill began to talk. He did so in a roundabout fashion, obviously not happy about the impending refusal. He talked of criminals who were worth a stretch or even longer, and of those who were not. He reminded Rollison that sometimes in the past he had deliberately withheld information from the police, because he had thought that a man was more sinned against than sinning. He was still on that theme when his wife, a little, bony, red-faced woman, came bustling in, carrying a tray. She greeted the Toff with delight, and talked for so long that Bill told her jestingly that they might as well have their dinner out of the frig.

Mrs Ebbutt could cook, and the food was excellent, but Rollison paid less attention to it than to Bill's story.

It gradually came out.

Bill *thought* he knew who the Hammer was, but he would do nothing to help the police to catch him. There was no use in believing everything one heard, but take it from him, the Hammer didn't use a gun and didn't travel armed. He had a great many helpers. He made a good living, admitted Bill Ebbutt, but he also did much good with his money.

Into Rollison's mind there sprang a picture of a man well-liked, beloved perhaps, by people such as Ebbutt. It surprised him only because of the contradictory stories about the Hammer. Bill would hear nothing against the man. No one had ever suffered hardship from his robberies, he declared, and no one ever would. Mr Rollison had not been in the district very much of late, he must have got all his information from the newspapers or the police.

'Yer can't trust 'em,' Bill declared. 'Some of them is all right, Mr Roll'son, but not many. Yer can't trust 'em, that's wot I say. There's been a lot've robberies, that's true. I don't deny it. An' the 'Ammer's done a lot of them, but 'e's never 'urt a soul. I could tell you a 'undred cases Mr Ar, where the 'Ammer's 'elped some poor devil. It's a fact. There's my missus, too, in the "Harmy". The "Harmy" does a lot o' good arahnd 'ere, but they couldn't do so much if the 'Ammer didn't send a donation. Anonymous, but *we* know 'oo sends it.'

At long last, Rollison interrupted him.

'How long has he been working. Bill?'

'Coupla years.'

'And he's always worked like this?'

'Allus since I can remember.'

'Does he know that the police think he's a violent criminal, a murderer, in fact?'

Bill growled; 'That 'e never was. The 'Ammer never croaked anyone, Mr Ar.'

'But the police think he did, and someone is trying very hard to prove that he did.'

'I'd like ter wring 'is neck!'

'But you can't,' said Rollison reasonably. 'Bill, if things go on as they are doing now, the Hammer will probably be caught and get a life sentence,' He was deliberately worsening the situation, goading Ebbutt into confidences. 'But if I can find out the truth, it might help.'

Bill looked at him steadily.

'You don't want ter give a tip to the dicks?'

'No, Bill. But I want to see the Hammer.'

'Well,' said Ebbutt, 'I'll try an' fix it. I trust you, Mr Ar, but you 'aven't ever met the 'Ammer. 'E don't know yer, yer see. 'E might not like the idea. But I'll try. I'll give you a ring. That do?'

‘That’s fine,’ said Rollison.

At six o’clock that evening, the telephone rang at the Gresham Terrace flat. Would Mr Rollison be at the Blue Dog, Wapping, at half-past eight, asked Bill Ebbutt.

The Blue Dog, Wapping, had an unsavoury reputation. It was on the corner of two dank, squalid, streets, near the Hundred Arches. The streets were ill-lit. Furtive figures flitted to and fro. There were odd, stealthy sounds. Windows showed few lights, but the Blue Dog itself was a beacon, spreading a glow for twenty yards or more. There, at half-past eight, the Toff arrived in an old suit, a muffler and a peaked cap. In his pocket was an automatic. The saloon bar was crowded. Someone was playing a mouth-organ, others were singing hoarsely and unmusically. Many were the furtive glances aimed at the stranger.

The door opened and a child of no more than ten looked in.

No one appeared to notice him, but the barman whispered to the barmaid. The lad looked round. He was well-fed, his cheeks glowing red, his eyes bright. He singled out Rollison, and gave him a slow, deliberate wink. Then he went out.

Rollison followed him into the shadowy street.

‘You the gent from Mr Ebbutt?’ asked the child.

‘That’s right.’

‘Foller me.’

Rollison followed, checking the landmarks. Second right, first left, third right from the Blue Dog.

The lad said suddenly; ‘Stay right ’ere, mister,’ and slipped off into the darkness.

Rollison waited, aware of the brooding silence, the stealthy noises, the slivers of light at windows, the hum of traffic on the main road, not far away. In the distance above the docks, there was a yellow glow where ships were loading by flood-lighting, for it was now quite dark. People passed, ignoring him, until out of the darkness came a girl, no older than the boy.

‘You from Mr Ebbutt?’ she asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Follow me.’

Again, Rollison followed, until the child reached a street which Rollison calculated could not be far from the Blue Dog.

She told him to wait, and disappeared, as the boy had done. Then an older lad arrived and took him on another journey. By that time Rollison had lost his bearings, and, but for his trust in Bill Ebbutt, he would have wondered whether he were wise to follow such guides. It was half-past nine when, once again, he was left on his own. This time he waited for ten minutes. He could see no one near him, yet he sensed a lurking presence.

He knew why this was being done. The Hammer was making sure that he had not been followed, that when at last he arrived in the Presence, no man in blue would step authoritatively forward from behind him.

Quick, light footsteps broke the brooding quiet.

A woman's voice asked: 'Are you Mr Rollison?'

'Yes.'

This time the follow-my-leader preamble was not so long. They turned into a narrow street and soon she opened the door of a small house, fronting the pavement. There was a dim light inside. She led him up the stairs into a comfortably furnished room. For the first time he saw the girl in a good light. There was a filmy scarf over her face which hid her features, but he noticed that her figure was young and pleasing, and that she was well-dressed.

A man was sitting at a writing-table, his attitude that of a busy man who had ten minutes to spare. He made no attempt to hide his face, which was good-looking and, in a way, disarming.

'Close the door, Janet,' he said, and as the girl went out, the door closed softly.

The Hammer pointed to an armchair.

'Sit down, Mr Rollison. What will you drink?'

'Whisky, thanks.'

'Soda?'

The Hammer poured out drinks, then left the desk and sat in an easy chair opposite Rollison. On the face of it he appeared benevolent, but his expression was not an easy one to read.

'I'm sorry that I am rather difficult to find,' he said with a smile. 'But I'm sure you understand the need for a rather circuitous approach. In spite of what Ebbutt told you, I *have* heard about you. There are not many people from your part of London with such a good reputation, and I did not hesitate to agree to see you.'

‘Thanks,’ said Rollison, dryly. ‘Did Ebbutt say why I wanted this meeting?’

‘No, simply that he thought it would be wise for me to see you.’

‘Do you know that I am helping the police on the Horniman murder case?’ Rollison asked.

‘Yes,’ said the Hammer. He seemed to stiffen, and now there was a touch of wariness that had not been there before.

‘Last night, a woman named Kent was arrested and will probably be charged with murdering Dr Finnigan,’ Rollison said, ‘and she told the police that she had been sent to see Finnigan by you.’

The Hammer said: ‘That is not true.’

‘Last night, a hammer was thrown through a window of my flat,’ Rollison said, ‘and that seemed to have a touch of defiance in it.’

‘I did not have the hammer thrown.’

Rollison persisted: ‘At least one of the people concerned in the murder of Horniman and in the murder of Dr Finnigan works at the Hammer Club, off Shepherds Market.’

‘I am not associated with the club,’ declared the Hammer, smiling faintly.

‘Well, those are three separate attempts to bring suspicion on you for the murders,’ said Rollison. ‘Clumsy attempts, perhaps, but they must be taken seriously by the police. The police may or may not believe that you have had anything to do with either, or both, of these murders, but they must redouble their attempts to find and question you. If they find you, they won’t confine their questions to these particular crimes.’

‘No,’ said the Hammer, and his smile broadened. ‘They would have a great many other questions, I’ve no doubt! Mr Rollison, you didn’t come to see me just to tell me this.’

‘No.’

‘Why did you come?’

‘Because it seems to me that someone who has good reason to dislike you would like you blamed for the murders,’ Rollison told him. ‘Murders for which he himself is responsible. He is either impersonating you, or you *are* responsible. I am assuming that you’re not. So, any known enemy of yours might be the man I want. He doesn’t know where to find you, or he would

have given the police that information. He's doing his best to make sure that the East End is combed thoroughly for you, and a search might be successful. You've had a long run.'

'So long a run that, provided I maintain all precautions, it looks as if it may continue,'

'It's not always wise to underrate the police,' said Rollison. 'Have you such a bitter enemy?'

After a long pause, the Hammer said: 'Yes, I think so. But I also think I can deal with the gentleman concerned, Mr Rollison. In fact, I assure you that I will.'

'And his name?'

'I am afraid that I cannot give you that,' said the Hammer. 'It would not be—' he paused and shrugged—'well, *ethical.* There *is* honour among thieves you know. And perhaps he knows more than we think,' added the Hammer. 'He might, if caught by the police, do me enough harm to prevent me from continuing my work.'

Rollison said: 'You're playing with fire.'

The Hammer shrugged. 'Maybe.'

Rollison said earnestly: 'The police will get this man, eventually. Short of killing him, you can't prevent that. And killing, whatever the motive, however benevolent the intention, *is* murder.'

'I don't think that will be necessary,' said the Hammer, 'and I am quite safe. Don't misunderstand me,' he added. 'I do appreciate your warning and I will take further precautionary steps. And, if I can assist you to find Horniman's murderer without injuring my own prospects, I will do so.'

Rollison asked bluntly: 'Do you know what this other man is doing?'

'I know a little. I will find out more. I will see that justice is done, Mr Rollison.'

'Did you know Horniman?'

'Slightly. I had no time for him. *And* I know that he was interested in the young man, Bruce Drayton, in whose interests you have been working. I do not know whether Drayton is alive or not. If he is, then I will try to make sure that he remains so.'

Slowly, Rollison shook his head.

'You can't walk in mud and remain entirely unspotted,' he said.

‘I can try,’ murmured the Hammer. ‘I doubt whether the police are convinced that there are *two* Hammers.’

Rollison said: ‘I’m assuming that there are, and I’m assuming that both will eventually be caught. You know more than you’ve told me, and that knowledge really makes you an accessory after the fact of murder, whether you’ve had anything to do with the crimes or not.’

The Hammer lifted his glass with a steady hand.

‘No, I am not an accessory,’ he said. ‘I have an inkling of what my particular enemy is doing, but I have few facts at my disposal. When, if ever, I do learn more, I will tell you about them. I have no more liking for murder than you have, Mr Rollison.’

Rollison shrugged his shoulders.

‘But you condone it,’ he said. ‘Whatever your motives, the results have proved evil. You built up an organisation which earned you the protection of the people, and as a result, it is being used to harm them, and can only bring disaster. You can stop it by ceasing to work, and telling the people that you have stopped.’

‘It is not so easy as that,’ said the Hammer. He stood up and pushed his chair back. And now there was a passionate sincerity in his voice. Rollison found it difficult to believe that it was assumed, that he was lying. The soft, cultured voice was persuasive, the glow in the man’s eyes appeared to be deeply sincere.

‘No, it is not so easy as that,’ repeated the Hammer. ‘Mr Rollison, when I first began to work, the lot of the people in this part of London defied imagination. There were patches of such abominable squalor that any humane man seeing it would have been appalled. Yet nothing was done. That is, by the authorities, for there were, and are, dozens of charitable organisations. These are all run by voluntary contributions. So, I decided, authority could not be counted on, and I resolved to help in my own way.’

The Hammer’s voice had dropped to a whisper. Rollison felt the spell of the man and, more strongly than ever, was convinced of his sincerity. Wrong-headed he might be, but this man *believed* in the righteousness of his cause.

‘Do you understand?’ he asked abruptly.

Rollison said: ‘Yes, but to understand is not necessarily to agree.’

As he spoke, the telephone bell rang. The Hammer turned towards it, and Rollison saw a change in his manner, a stiffening, a wariness. He lifted the receiver.

There was a pause, as he listened. Then he replaced the receiver and turned to Rollison, his expression harsh and menacing. ‘So you brought the police, Mr Rollison!’

Someone began to bang on a door below.

Chapter Sixteen

Raid

There was a hammer in the man's hand. Long-handled, heavy-headed, it looked an ugly weapon. Quick footsteps sounded on the stairs, and the banging continued; it grew louder. The door of the room burst open, and the girl who had been addressed as Janet appeared.

'They're here!' she gasped, 'we're caught, Jim, we're caught!'

The Hammer took a step towards Rollison, his weapon raised.

'Yes,' he said, in a thin voice. 'Nicely trapped by the helpful Mr Rollison!'

'Jim!' the girl gasped.

The man stood, with the hammer raised, and Rollison thought that in the surge of fear and disappointment, the sudden destruction of the safety which he had prized so much and had given him such confidence, he might do desperate things. There was a rending sound from downstairs as if a panel had been broken in.

'The window!' cried Janet, 'Jim, try the window, don't—'

The hammer swung. Rollison pushed out his foot and the wicked-looking weapon flashed past his shoulder.

Rollison said sharply: 'Get behind the door,' and pushed the man against the wall. 'Do exactly what I tell you,' he said to the girl. 'Sit in that chair, don't look worried, don't look frightened.' He turned rapidly, meeting the Hammer's startled gaze. 'Is there anything against Janet?' he hissed. 'Quickly!'

'No.'

'Who is she?'

'This is her house. I rent part of it.'

Rollison nodded curtly, and turned towards the door. He could see the head of a man coming upstairs, and recognised Sergeant Barrow. As he went forward, he wondered whether the Hammer would have the good sense to realise that, if he kept quite still, he might yet escape; there was, of course, the risk

that the man would believe this to be part of the trap, and would strike at him again.

He reached the head of the stairs, and Barrow exclaimed: 'Rollison!'

'Yes,' smiled Rollison, cheerfully. 'I chose a good night, apparently.'

'I'll talk to you later,' said Barrow brusquely, and looked over Rollison's shoulder. 'You know the Hammer lives here, don't you?'

'He did,' said Rollison, sadly.

'What do you mean, did?'

'I was to have met him here,' said Rollison, 'but he sent a message that he had been compelled to move. I've been trying to get some sense out of the girl here,' he went on, 'but I don't think she knows a great deal, except that the man was a lodger.'

'Lodger!'

'Well of course,' said Rollison impatiently, 'you must know what lodgers are!'

Was there a chance? he wondered. Had there ever been a chance of keeping Barrow out of that room? In the first flush of hope, he had thought so, but now he doubted it. Barrow would have to search the house, that was obvious; and the Hammer could not hide in that small room, and had no chance of getting out of it. He felt sick at heart; rightly or wrongly, he wanted the Hammer to have a chance. He wondered, even as he looked into Barrow's unfriendly eyes, how much he was influenced by the fact that if the Hammer were caught that night, it would be placed to his 'credit'. He knew that, if this happened, there would never be a welcome for 'Mr Ar' in the East End of London, no matter how he defended himself. A phase in his life seemed about to end, and he realised as he stood there just how much it meant to him.

Barrow seemed undecided. The last thing he would dream, of course, was that Rollison had just interviewed the suspect. He would take it for granted that the room was empty but for the girl, even if he searched it afterwards for papers or other evidence.

Then the girl got up and came out on to the landing. Rollison, who had been concerned only with making her appear unruffled by the raid, wondered if he had overdone it, whether some

show of alarm or protest would not have been wiser.

Her voice was icy. 'Who are you?' she demanded.

'Det. Sergeant Barrow, of New Scotland Yard,' Barrow said. *'And* I have a search warrant.'

'There is no need to break down doors in order to execute a search warrant,' she said, sharply.

'There was no answer when—'

'There would have been, had you possessed a little patience,' said Janet, and Rollison warmed to her, while marvelling at her steadiness. He marvelled still more when she turned, pushed back the door of the room, and invited Barrow to start his search. Barrow entered the room in front of her.

There was no one behind the door, no sign of the Hammer; even the ugly-looking weapon had vanished.

'Weren't you a little too eager?' Rollison asked Barrow.

'Mr Rollison, I know my job. We've been looking for this man for two years,' said Barrow icily. 'How did you know he was here?'

'From the same source as you, I expect,' said Rollison, cheerfully. He was thinking that there were two – no, three – ways in which the Hammer might have escaped: the window, the walls or through the ceiling. There might, also, be a loft. He forced himself not to glance upwards.

Other men came into the room, including the local divisional Superintendent. The news of failure had travelled fast, and their expressions were both rueful and disappointed.

It was suggested that they should look in the other rooms. A uniformed policeman was left in the study with Rollison and Janet, giving them no opportunity to speak without being heard.

The search took very little time, but from one of the rooms there came the sound of tapping.

The Superintendent came back and grinned at Rollison.

'Barrow's looking for secret hiding-places,' he said.

'This is ridiculous!' snapped Janet. 'You have not yet explained why you have invaded the privacy of my house. I suppose that man *has* the right to search?'

'Every right, ma'am, yes.' The Superintendent smiled at her, as if anxious to placate. 'Your lodger is a notorious character.'

'A *what*?'

‘A notorious character. Known as the Hammer.’

‘Then,’ said Janet firmly. ‘I am extremely glad that he got away. There is more good in him than in—’

The Superintendent gave an uneasy laugh.

‘Could be. But all the same, ma’am, I shouldn’t voice sentiments like those about wanted men.’ He paused, and when he spoke again his voice had become more official ‘I understand he gave the name of Taylor?’

‘Yes.’

‘When did he first come?’ asked the Superintendent, and the formal questioning was soon under way.

Janet answered coolly and without hesitation. Her story was that Taylor had left that afternoon and sent a message that he would not be returning. She allowed it to be understood that she felt bitter towards the police, because they had lost her a good lodger who paid well. All this the Superintendent accepted good-humouredly, while another man took notes.

Barrow’s tapping continued.

He came into the study when the questioning was finished, and began operations there. Only when the walls and ceiling had been examined and the carpet rolled back did he appear satisfied.

When he began on the desk, Janet asked permission to go downstairs. After she had gone, Barrow turned to Rollison.

‘How did you know the address?’ he demanded.

‘A man telephoned me and told me I would find the Hammer here,’ Rollison said, brightly.

‘The same trick as he used on us,’ said the Superintendent, looking up. ‘Someone doesn’t like the Hammer, that’s clear, but he seems to have been too fly for the informer and for us.’

‘What about the girl?’ asked Barrow, sourly. ‘She doesn’t look the type to live in a place like this, does she?’

‘She’ll be watched,’ the Superintendent said. ‘You’ve let this business throw you off your balance, sergeant. She’s lived here for ten years, to my knowledge.’

Barrow shrugged his shoulders.

They left after a stay of nearly two hours, and Rollison went with them. He still had no idea how the Hammer had got out of the room, or where he had gone. Barrow gave him a lift as far as Trafalgar Square, and then went to the Yard to report. On the

way, the sergeant had been aloof and unfriendly. Rollison's dislike of him crystallised.

In a taxi, he tried to clarify his thoughts. The Hammer had created a powerful impression. He liked what he had seen of the man. *Was* there someone else impersonating him? Or was it a case of split personality, already suggested by Grice? He brooded over the possibility. The impassioned voice of the man lingered in his ears, but in someone with a split personality, such passion and sincerity were to be expected.

Rollison reached Gresham Terrace a little after midnight. There was a light in the front room. Jolly opened the door as he reached the head of the stairs, having judged the moment with uncanny accuracy.

'I'm very glad you are back, sir. A gentleman has been waiting to see you for the last hour, and insisted on waiting, however late you were.'

'Who is it?' asked Rollison.

'He would not give me his name, sir,' said Jolly, disapprovingly. 'Will you see him?'

'If he's taken that much trouble, who am I to thwart him?' asked Rollison, a trifle wearily.

Jolly opened the sitting-room door, and as Rollison entered the Hammer stood up.

Rollison looked at Jolly and said quietly: 'We'll have coffee, Jolly, and no more visitors until I'm through.' Jolly bowed and left the room, while Rollison and the Hammer confronted each other, Rollison straight-faced, the Hammer with a slight smile. The silence grew prolonged; it was as if each man was determined that the other should speak first.

At last, the Hammer said: 'I'm here to prove that I'm convinced of your integrity, Mr Rollison.'

'Thanks.' Rollison offered cigarettes. 'Don't test it too far. Why did you really come?'

'We had not finished our conversation.'

Rollison laughed. 'You could call it that! How did you get out of the room?'

'Through the ceiling, then to the roof of the house next door,' said the Hammer. 'I only needed a little time, and you obtained it for me. How is Janet?'

‘They didn’t detain her.’

‘I’m very glad about that,’ said the Hammer. Jolly brought in the coffee, and there was silence until he had gone.

Then Rollison said: ‘This enemy of yours shows malice.’

‘Yes. His name is Benson, by the way. On two occasions I have been able to look after much of the proceeds of his burglaries for him, and he has not appreciated it.’ He smiled at Rollison, silently appealing to him to see the funny side of this.

Rollison murmured: ‘Set a thief to rob a thief.’

‘I like to think that I did more good—’ the Hammer began. Rollison said: ‘Just a moment.’ He sat on the edge of the table, bringing a touch of informality to their conversation. ‘Don’t think I’m out of sympathy with anyone who helps the poorer people in the East End, but motives are only half the battle. Hold-ups, smash-and-grab and the rest of it, whichever way you look at it, *are* crimes, and you commit them. I gave you time this evening because I wanted to talk to you again, because I didn’t want you to be trapped in that way, certainly not by me, but you’ve got to understand that I am on the side of law.’

‘Oh, I understand that,’ the Hammer said.

‘This man Benson betrayed you, you say. If he learned where you lived he must have spent a lot of time tracing you. He could only do it through Ebbutt and people like him. He almost certainly knows that your Janet is a party to your crimes. If he can betray you he can betray the others. Isn’t that common-sense?’

The Hammer did not speak, but stubbed out his cigarette.

‘By coming here, you’ve forced on me the onus of either giving you up, or letting you go again,’ said Rollison. He smiled grimly. ‘By coming to my flat, a place which might be watched by the police, you’ve put me in a spot. It’s a curious attitude for a man who professes to be a philanthropist, isn’t it?’

The Hammer said slowly: ‘What are you driving at, Rollison?’

‘Finding out why you’re here,’ said Rollison.

After a pause, the Hammer said: ‘I’m here because in spite of what I said earlier, I think I can help you to find Bruce Drayton. I hope that is a sufficient reason.’

Chapter Seventeen

Benson

It was easy to believe the man.

Rollison, convinced until that moment that the Hammer had come in a spirit of mingled gratitude and bravado, attempted to hide his surprise.

'You want to find him, don't you?' the Hammer asked calmly.

'Is he alive?'

'I have every reason to think so. Benson will be able to tell you, I am quite sure of that. Earlier tonight,' went on the Hammer, 'I told you that I was slightly acquainted with Horniman. I did not think it wise, just then, to tell you that I have known Horniman for some time; not because of his recent activities, but because he is – or was – a friend of Benson's. I have long been aware that Benson, once he found me, would do everything he could to have me caught. Horniman, at one time, was a partner of Benson's in the Hammer Club. I think it was named after me,' he added, mildly.

'Is that where Benson lives and works?'

'He lives nearby, in Hackett Mews. I learned some weeks ago that he was concerned in a kidnapping affair, and. wanted help for the job. I did not know who was to be the victim, but I think I know now. I heard afterwards that something had gone wrong and that murder had been committed, though the kidnapping itself had been successful. It may be wrong, of course,' he added, slowly, 'and yet …' he shrugged his shoulders. 'I know Benson fairly well. He once worked with me.'

'Did you know that Horniman was concerned in this case?'

'I suspected it, but I couldn't be sure. I am sure of this though: Horniman and Benson between them, worked up a most comprehensive and dangerous organisation for extorting blackmail. When this business is finally cleared up, I am pretty sure that you will find blackmail on a grand scale at the root of it. Men like Benson and Horniman may change their methods,

but rarely their objective. Benson's part in the crime wave has been carried out largely by men he had blackmailed into doing what he told them. For a long time, Rollison, I have wondered how I could stop it. The man does the East End nothing but discredit.'

Rollison let the remark pass.

'That is why I was prepared to handle him, when I learned what you had told me,' the Hammer went on. 'But I misled you, Rollison: I intended to kill him.'

Rollison watched the man intently: the handsome face, the faint smile, the gleam in the calm eyes, all were impressive. The Hammer was still sure of himself, but his confidence had become dangerously like conceit. There was no doubt of the man's courage, and none of his hatred for Benson. He had come to seek revenge; and in his seeking there was a coldness which went ill with his benevolent appearance and charming manner.

He leaned forward.

'Believe me when I say that I shall not allow myself to be caught. I began this work with a set purpose in my mind, taking every care and precaution to build up a perfect organisation. My one weakness has been Benson, and I do not think he will trouble me much longer. I could have dealt with him without telling you, but that would not have helped you. I think the police will uncover other crimes than that against Drayton, Horniman and Finnigan. I would like them uncovered. And I owe you a debt which I can best repay with this information. But—don't make the mistake of thinking that I can be frightened by the threat of any penalty whatever.'

'I see,' murmured Rollison, mildly.

'When this affair is over, I hope that you will forget that we have ever met,' said the Hammer. 'In different ways we aim at the same thing, you *do* understand that, don't you?'

'You're reputation is certainly high in some quarters,' said Rollison.

'Have you any doubts?'

Rollison laughed. 'I have doubts of anyone who coolly contemplates murder,' he said. 'If I may advise you, I would suggest that you retire now, from, this moment.'

'I don't understand you.'

'But I used simple words! You won't keep free from the police

indefinitely. You've done some good. Be satisfied with it.'

'Is this a declaration of war?' asked the Hammer, gently.

'It's a clear-cut warning,' said Rollison. 'You're already at war with the police. I help the police. Let's call this a temporary truce.'

'Rollison, over two hundred people in the East End of London receive regular assistance from me: financial assistance which they cannot afford to do without. You and the police know a little of one side of my organisation, you do not know anything about the other. If you want to learn more about it, ask Janet. She deals with the benevolent side. You should know that if people like Ebbutt offer unswerving loyalty, that the East End is solidly behind me. You have been tolerated by many and liked by some for years, but you are not one of them, I am. Don't underrate the importance of this.'

'I won't do that,' Rollison assured him.

'And advise the police,' went on the Hammer, 'that everything in which Benson is interested, everything at the Hammer Club, will warrant the closest possible investigation.' He stood up. 'I must go,' he said simply. 'You won't be foolish enough to try to stop me, will you?'

'We've agreed on a truce.'

'Thank you.'

Rollison led him to the door and across the hall. The Hammer walked lightly. At the front door, he gave Rollison a flashing smile. 'Thank you,' he said again, and let himself out.

Jolly appeared by the kitchen door as soon as the man had gone. He took one look at Rollison's face and promptly went back into the kitchen. 'Jolly!' called Rollison irritably. 'I do wish you wouldn't keep popping in and out. I particularly want to speak to you.'

Jolly appeared again. 'Yes, sir.'

'You heard most of that, I suppose?'

'Everything, sir.'

'What do you make of it?'

'A curious gentleman,' said Jolly. 'I think you were wise to let him go, and I also think you will be wise to telephone Scotland Yard immediately and ask them to investigate all Benson's activities.'

'Yes,' said Rollison. He turned to the telephone and dialled

the Yard, but Superintendent Grice, it appeared, was not in, nor was Inspector Ridgely. Rollison was put through to Ridgely's office, where a sergeant took his message. The sergeant's gruff: 'Yes … Yes … Yes … after every pause gave Rollison no indication of what was to come.

'That's the lot,' said Rollison.

'Thank you, sir. But you're rather late, if I may say so.'

'Late?'

'Benson was found dead in the office of the Hammer Club an hour and a half ago,' said the sergeant. 'His skull had been smashed in with a hammer.'

Rollison's first impulse was to go at once to the Hammer Club, but he resisted it. With the police in charge, there would be little that he could do. So he went to bed, to Jolly's obvious relief. Grice would either come himself, or send for him, early in the morning. He could decide then whether to tell the story of the Hammer's visit; he need not disclose his first encounter with the man.

He slept well.

At eight o'clock. Jolly came in with tea and the morning papers. Each, as Rollison expected, had a front page headline about the Hammer Club murder, but only two of them had the story of the raid on the house in Wapping; and only one had connected those two stories. That was the *Daily Cry*, and the *Cry* had made a splash in half-page headlines, liberally adorned with photographs. Somehow they had obtained one of Janet which startled Rollison, though not as much as the sub-heading itself:

HAMMER GIVES FORTUNE IN PENSIONS
Thefts All For Charity?

Rollison read on.

'The police were astounded to find at the Hammer's home, 27 Milch Street, Wapping, a card-index system administered by Mrs Janet Piper, his housekeeper. Over five hundred names and addresses were found, and each person in the file has been the recipient, at some time or other, of charity from the Hammer. In many cases this incredible "Robin Hood" actually makes regular

payments, or pensions, to the deserving poor of the East End of London. Total payments amount to over ten thousand pounds.

'Mrs Piper told the police that she understood her employer, who gave his name as Taylor, was a wealthy philanthropist who preferred to dispense charity without publicity. She had no idea that he was the Hammer. According to a police statement, the Hammer is a notorious criminal wanted on charges of robbery with violence, but in the East End there is a different version of his activities. He has won the respect of thousands of people. It is safe to say that many of them could identify the Hammer, but no one will betray him.'

Rollison finished reading, pouring out another cup of tea, and then looked up as Jolly came in. He touched the paper.

'Have you seen this, Jolly?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Any conclusions from it?'

'The man last night *looked* capable of such munificence,' said Jolly, after a moment's reflection. 'And in view of what he said, the story is hardly surprising. I wish he had not killed Benson, though.'

'Did he kill Benson?' asked Rollison.

'I don't think there is much doubt about that, sir,' said Jolly. 'Your bath is ready, sir,' he added, and went out.

'Ah,' murmured Rollison. 'My bath is ready!'

Snub came in soon afterwards. Rollison heard him busy in the sitting-room, going through the correspondence.

For several days he and Jolly had handled that between them, which amused Rollison. It was surprising how quickly and easily Snub had become 'one of the family'. His unobtrusive presence disturbed nothing of the smooth efficiency of the household, he had been a first-class investment. And, thought Rollison, he was no fool; it would be interesting to know what he's made of the present situation.

Snub had read the *Daily Cry*, and Rollison told him of the Hammer's visit.

'And that puts you up to date with everything,' he added. 'What do you make of it?'

Snub said: 'Do you really want my opinion?'

'Yes, of course.'

'The first thing that strikes me,' said Snub, 'and I expect it's

struck you too, is that we seem to be working on two separate cases. Bruce Drayton, Miss Lancaster and Horniman in one, the Hammer and Benson in the other. You've only got the Hammer's word for it that Horniman and Benson were accomplices, haven't you?'

'A good point,' admitted Rollison. 'Yes.'

'At one time it rather looked as if the Horniman faction were trying to make you believe that the Hammer was involved,' said Snub, 'and I've wondered whether— but it's a bit crazy,' he broke off, a little diffidently.

'Let's have it.'

'Could the *Hammer* be trying to make you believe that Horniman and Benson were working together, so as to sidetrack you?' asked Snub. 'This philanthropy ploy is all very well, and you've seen the man and I haven't, but it doesn't really ring true. Not with me, at all events. It doesn't seem feasible,' he went on, with some embarrassment because Rollison was looking at him intently. 'I don't know that I believe in Robin Hoods, and that's what the Hammer is trying to make himself out to be.'

'Robin Hood up-to-date,' Rollison murmured.

'Even so, he hasn't convinced me,' persisted Snub,

'He hasn't entirely convinced me either,' said Rollison thoughtfully. 'Care for a job?

'Out and about you mean?'

'I doubt if the Hammer knows that you work for me,' said Rollison, 'and no one in the East End does, that's reasonably certain. Turn yourself into a newspaper reporter, try to get in touch with Mrs Janet What's-her-name …'

'Piper.'

'Janet Piper, and find out what you can,' said Rollison. 'Don't try any sensational tricks, take it easily, and impress her with the fact that you're a nice, helpful young man, all in favour of Robin Hood, new version. Try to get a feel of the situation, find out her general attitude towards it and drop one or two hints about blackmail and Horniman; they're all mentioned in the *Daily Cry*, so there won't be anything surprising in it. Do you think you can tackle it?'

'Like a shot!'

'And when you've finished with her, whether you have any

luck or not, just wander about the East End, looking for a "story" on the Hammer. Try the pubs. You'll learn more there than anywhere else. All I want is a composite picture of the East End reaction to it, whether it agrees with the *Cry's* assessment of the situation or not. And don't,' added Rollison, 'run yourself into any trouble.'

Snub nodded, his eyes a little too innocent.

'Oh, and while you're there,' Rollison continued, 'visit the *Lion* and try to find out whether the Hammer's popularity has gained ground, and whether mine has fallen sharply since last night. As far as Ebbutt and the others know, the police raid was a result of my visit. They may blame me. If they are thinking along those lines, I'll go down there tonight.'

'Right-ho,' said Snub. 'I don't travel armed, I suppose?'

'You do not! And don't haunt the side-streets.'

Snub went off, in great delight, leaving Jolly to talk over his latest suggestion.

'As Mr Higginbottom said, sir, there doesn't *seem* to be very much connection between the two crimes.'

'But there must be, and the Hammer gave us a line. Mrs Willis was blackmailed, so was Ethel Kent. Are they going to blackmail Susan, I wonder?' Rollison glanced at his watch. 'It's half-past ten. Does anything strike you as being unusual this morning, Jolly?'

'I expected Mr Grice to call or telephone before this, sir.'

'So did I,' admitted Rollison. 'I wonder if there is any suspicion that I helped the Hammer to get away? Barrow wasn't exactly all over me last night.'

Grice neither telephoned nor put in an appearance during the morning. No one from Scotland Yard called. Susan rang through to ask, rather dispiritedly, whether there was any news, and Rollison promised to see her during the afternoon. It was surprising how far removed from Bruce and Susan this case had become. He thought of Snub's suggestion that he was deliberately being side-tracked. Could there be any truth in it? The confusion was so chaotic that it might well have been deliberately created. There was only the one, thin, connecting thread, and that had been put in his mind by the Hammer and the hapless Kent.

Jolly brought lunch up from the restaurant.

Rollison had nearly finished it when the telephone rang. The caller was Snub, his voice almost as dispirited as Susan's had been.

It appeared that he hadn't been able to get anything at all out of Janet. There seemed to be more to it than that, but Rollison discerned a reluctance in Snub to tell him.

It came out at last.

'Well,' said Snub, 'it's about you. Your name's mud. I thought I'd better let you know. Every other person I speak to seems to think you made trouble for the Hammer, and it isn't going to be easy to live down.'

Chapter Eighteen

End of a Reputation?

Hostility was everywhere.

Rollison made his trip to the East End a little after six o'clock that evening. He called at places where normally he would have been welcomed as exuberantly as he had been by Bill Ebbutt; instead, he had been met with thinly-veiled antagonism. At the *Lion*, Flatty slipped through the side door as Rollison went into the saloon bar, while Liz slapped a glass of beer on the counter in front of him and, when Rollison asked for Ebbutt, said coldly: 'He's out – to you.' Yet he had distinctly heard Ebbutt's voice booming from the inner room.

The desire to see Ebbutt became an obsession. Rollison finished his beer and went to the door leading to the parlour. A powerful looking man blocked his path.

'That's private, mister.'

'Yes, I know,' said Rollison. He felt a flare of annoyance, but forced himself not to show it. 'All the same, I'm going in.'

'You're *not'*

Rollison laid a hand on the other's forearm. 'I don't want to make trouble,' he said. For a moment their eyes met, and then the man shrugged his shoulders, and stood grudgingly aside.

Rollison, pushing on, saw that Bill and three other men were sitting in earnest conclave about the central table. The room was gloomy, for it was nearly nine o'clock, and only one dim light burned. The three men with Bill Ebbutt pushed their chairs back and stared at Rollison, with that same silent hostility which he had met everywhere.

Bill kept his seat.

'You've jumped to conclusions, Bill, haven't you?' asked Rollison.

''Ave I?' asked Ebbutt. There was no truculence, no real hostility in his voice. He looked weary. 'I don't fink so, Mr Roll'son. I know the *facks,'* he went on, heavily. 'I s'pose yer did

wot yer thought was the right fing, but I told yer 'ow we stood wiv' the 'Ammer.'

Rollison said: 'Bill, if it weren't for me, the Hammer would now be at Cannon Row, and he would have been up before the beak this morning.'

Ebbutt looked away from him. A man sniffed. The atmosphere of hostility worsened. Long ago, Rollison had dealt with such suspicion and scepticism as this, but he had not thought that the day would come when he would have to fight it again.

One of the men said in a thin, accusing voice: 'It ain't no good, Roll'son, we know wot 'appened. Yer took the police to the 'Ammer. That's good enough fer us. Why don't you sling yer 'ook?'

Another said: 'If I was you, I wouldn't stay arahnd after dark, it mightn't be 'ealfy.'

The third growled: 'Scram!'

Rollison pulled up a chair and sat down. Ebbutt looked at him steadily, but without respect. He glanced authoritatively at the others.

'Leave 'im to me.'

They went without arguing. Rollison wondered whether any of them would decide that the time was ripe to settle their account with him. There had always been a section of this community which had disliked and feared him; and rumour could spread incredibly fast in the East End of Loudon. Only a few yards away was the gymnasium, where well-trained, powerful men gathered every night; and executed rough justice when it was considered necessary.

Ebbutt put his hands flat on the table.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'Yer don't know 'ow sorry, Mr Roll'son, but facks is facks. You'll be better off if yer keep away from this part've the world fer a bit. I'm sorry.'

After a pause, Rollison said: 'How long have you known me?'

'Ten years, I s'spose. But—'

'Twelve, Bill. That's a long time.'

'That makes it worse,' declared Ebbutt, He leaned forward. 'Yer've been away from us fer a long time, too, Mr Roll'son. I ain't blamin' you, but them's facks, You 'aven't bin inside the *Lion* for six munce or more. You've been in your own part've London, an' that's orl right by me. You've 'elped the police, an'

that's orl right by me, too, but it don't make yer welcome down 'ere. It's 'appened before,' he added, slowly. 'You've become a policeman except for the uniform, Mr Roll'son. You don't see fings the way you useter. Maybe the 'Ammer's done a lot that 'e shouldn't accordin' to *your* way've thinkin', but 'e's done plenty've good too. I'm makin' it simple,' he added, 'that's the way it's got to be. We don't trust you any more Mr Roll'son. I'm sorry, but there it is. I'll see nuthin' 'appens to you tonight, I'll make sure've that, but you would be arstin' for trouble if you come dahn again.' He got up, ponderously.

It was so difficult to argue because the man's mind was made up. In less than twenty-four hours the whole attitude had changed. Rollison knew the obstinacy of these people, he also knew how deeply loyal they could be. He could understand why the shock of the 'discovery' had affected them, but what surprised him was the fact that Ebbutt, of all people, had made up his mind so firmly.

And then, quite without warning, Rollison laughed. He had to break through the surface of Ebbutt's hostility, and suddenly it had come upon him that they expected the Toff to laugh. They would take seriousness to be an admission of guilt; an intention to try to justify himself.

'All right, Bill,' he said. 'Have it your own way. Don't worry about a protection squad. I'll manage. But I'll make one deal with you.'

Ebbutt stared at him, uncomprehendingly, but puzzled now.

'I shall expect a barrel of beer delivered to my flat on the day that you have to eat your words,' said Rollison. 'There isn't any better beer in London. I'll be seeing you,' he touched the handle of the door, then, looking more serious, he asked: 'Tell me one thing. Why are you so sure?'

Ebbutt hesitated, then took a bulky wallet from his pocket. It was torn at the edges and letters and papers bulged out of it, but unerringly he selected one, and handed it to Rollison. It was a single sheet of paper, folded in three. Rollison opened it, his heart beating fast, and the first thing he saw was the rubber impression of a small hammer, in place of a signature.

The words were typewritten; he remembered the typewriter on the Hammer's desk.

He read: 'I don't blame you, Ebbutt. Rollison nearly convinced

me. But one of the police told J. that Rollison had tipped them off.'

He read it again, trying to decide how best to make Ebbutt doubt the truth of it. A direct denial would be useless, J – for Janet Piper – was obviously as well known and trusted as the Hammer himself.

His smile had not disappeared while he read. Now, he pushed the paper into Ebbutt's hand, and shrugged his shoulders.

'I see. I could have a hundred rubber-stamps made like that in twenty-four hours, Bill. It's a mistake to take everything for granted.'

He opened the door and went into the saloon bar.

Chatter and laughter filled the crowded room. The blue haze of tobacco smoke was so thick that he could hardly see half a dozen yards before him. But he did not need to see; a silence fell. Hostile stares came from some, while others averted their gaze. The whole thing appeared to be spontaneous, but it could have been organised.

Rollison pushed his way to the opposite door, while Ebbutt stood behind him, watching. Then someone flung a glass. It smashed against the lintel, and pieces fell about Rollison's shoulders. Ebbutt roared: 'None o' that!' Rollison opened the door, looked round and laughed.

'Don't forget, Bill – a barrel of beer on the day you eat your words,'

Outside the gymnasium, in the dimly-lit side street, he saw a little group of men, standing motionless. At sight of him two or three of them moved. He wondered whether they would attack, for he sensed hatred as well as hostility here, and the impression that it had been carefully and cleverly organised grew apace. He took half a dozen steps towards the brighter lights of the Mile End Road, and then abruptly turned. A man had been creeping up to him; he wondered whether his fist held a cosh or a knuckle-duster. He pushed the fellow aside, and walked towards the darker end of the street, briskly but without hurrying. In the doorway of the gymnasium, he recognised Flatty and others who once would have called out a cheerful greeting. All were silent.

He walked on.

Ebbutt came running up, calling out his name. He drew alongside.

‘Don’t *arst* for trouble, Mr Roll’son.’

‘If it really comes to it,’ said Rollison, ‘I can still give as good as I get. I’m going to see Janet Piper.’

‘You’re *crazy!’*

‘There are plenty of people here to stop me,’ said Rollison, cheerfully, ‘if they really don’t want me to go, let them get to work.’

He walked on. Furtive, shadowy figures followed, but Rollison did not look around. If they once thought that he was frightened of them, they might attack; and the meaner spirits, or those who had never really believed in the Toff, might attack in any case. At all costs he must show a fearless front. He reached the end of the street and turned right. Soon he was in the rabbit warren of lanes and alleys and side-streets where the children had led him the night before. Now that he knew the address, he knew how to get there. Although his footsteps rang out on the pavements, he was listening intently, sometimes wishing that he had brought rubber shoes, so that he could judge to a nicety whether anyone was close behind him.

At each corner, he glanced round; each time he passed beneath a lighted lamp, he stiffened, half-expecting a knife to be slung at him out of the darkness.

He reached the end of Milch Street.

There was a brighter light there; he thought perhaps the police had arranged that, and were watching the Hammer’s house in the hope that it would have callers. The danger ought to be less by now, but he would still have to run the gauntlet when he left.

He turned the corner.

Something whizzed through the air. Then it crashed against the wall of a house: a knife, broken by the impact with the brick. He neither flinched nor looked round.

The police were not here, or they would have shown themselves by now.

He reached Number 27, and lifting the brass knocker, brought it down with a resounding thwack. There was no immediate response, but soon he heard brisk footsteps inside. The door opened and, outlined against the light from a room at the end of the passage, stood Janet Piper.

‘Who is it?’ she asked, staring out into the street; and then her

expression altered, and she exclaimed: '*You!'* She backed away and slammed the door to, but Rollison thrust his foot forward and it swung back on her.

'Reward for past services?' asked Rollison, lightly. Her reaction had lessened his nervous tension. 'That's hard, Janet.'

'*Hard!'* she breathed. 'You have a nerve to come here after last night!'

'Do you really remember last night?'

'You took me in then,' she said, tensely, 'but I am not going to be fooled again.'

'But you are being fooled,' said Rollison. 'All the time you malign me you're being fooled, Janet, the problem is, who by? Not the Hammer, I hope, but certainly by someone.'

'Thanks to *you,'* she said, in a trembling voice, 'hundreds of people who were getting help from—from the Hammer will now get none at all. *That* ought to make you feel proud. It would have been bad enough had someone else cheated him, but he trusted you. No one else has ever seen him without his mask.'

Rollison said: 'He came to see me last night, after Benson had been killed.'

'I don't believe you,' she said. 'I've heard from him. He knows you betrayed him.'

Had she really received a message from the Hammer, or from this other shadowy masquerader? Rollison wanted to believe that someone else had sent it, tricking her as to its authenticity, but it was difficult. The facts were simple. Rollison had told the Hammer not to expect too much help; and the Hammer, quick to sense danger, had changed his methods.

Yet the man need not have appeared to Rollison without his mask.

'It doesn't add up,' Rollison said, aloud.

'It adds up all right,' said Janet. 'Move your foot.'

'You know that the Hammer will be blamed for Benson's murder, don't you?' asked Rollison.

'He's killed no one,' said Janet. '*Move your foot*!'

Rollison kept it there. Had the Hammer killed Benson? It seemed so clear: he had left Milch Street, gone to the Hammer Club, committed his crime and then come to see Rollison; *yes,* it seemed clear, but why had he also allowed *Jolly* to see his face?

There was another thing. As he stood there, with the light shining full on him, facing Janet's set lips and angry eyes, Rollison thought of Benson. He had been a danger to the Hammer, it seemed likely that he had impersonated the Hammer. As he was dead, he could not have sent that note.

Was there someone else, still unknown?

Or was the Hammer a Jekyll and Hyde?

Janet attempted to bang the door again. Rollison laughed.

'All right, I'll go,' he said, 'but tell me one thing: did the police tell you that I had tipped them off last night?'

'Yes,' she said, 'that curly-haired man told me.'

Rollison thought: 'Barrow, by George!' and took his foot away. The door slammed, and darkness fell about him again.

Chapter Nineteen

Once More — Cold Shoulder

‘Sergeant Barrow,’ mused Rollison, as he left Milch Street and turned left, for it was quicker getting to the main road that way, and he had no desire to stay too long in the side-streets. The memory of the clatter as the knife had hit the wall was all too vivid. In the past he had known danger in these parts often enough, this was no different from a hundred other journeys he had made – except that now he could expect no help, no warning, from those once well-disposed. ‘I would very much like a word with Sergeant Barrow’ he added to himself.

He turned a corner; and two men fell in by his side.

They did not speak, but walked alongside him, matching their pace to his. Though they made no immediate attempt to touch him, Rollison knew that he could not get away without risking a fight.

The three of them walked on steadily until they reached the next corner, when one of the men went ahead to reconnoitre. He beckoned. They passed the corner, and the manoeuvre was repeated at the next. Only then did Rollison realise the truth: Ebbutt had sent him a bodyguard.

Ebbutt, then, knew that there would be trouble.

The attack came when they were in the middle of that street. One moment the only sound was of their footsteps, and the next the street seemed full of running men. They dived from doorways and archways and Rollison found himself in the middle of a gasping, struggling, heaving mass. They were trying to get at him, they had no other purpose. He felt a sharp pain in his arm; a razor cut. He struck a man beneath the chin and saw him rocket back on his heels. He saw Ebbutt’s men laying about them with short sticks. A knuckle-duster glistened in the street lamp. Rollison swerved to avoid it. Another struck him on the shoulder. As one of the men closed in for a vicious attack, Rollison had a strong feeling that he had seen him before; but

there was no time now to speculate. He wished he had a weapon. His arm was painful, and his shoulder throbbed. Although he had felt so sure this attack would come, it had, in fact, taken him by surprise.

One of Ebbutt's men went down.

Rollison saw three men coming at him in a concerted rush. There were others behind.

He went forward, as fast as he could go, and the force of his counter-attack took them by surprise. One man fell and another tripped over him. But those from behind were very close to him now.

The shrill *peeeeep!* of a police whistle screeched above the thud of feet, then the headlights of a car shone along the street. Two or three of Rollison's assailants took to their heels. Others turned to run as the car pulled up with a screech of brakes.

A man swept Rollison's legs from under him as the police leapt from the car. One of them bent over Rollison.

'Are you all right?'

'Yes,' said Rollison. 'A bit swimmy, that's all.'

The man helped him up. 'It's Mr Rollison, isn't it?'

Rollison nodded.

'They don't often treat *you* like this,' the man said.

'Nothing's certain,' Rollison commented, 'in a very uncertain world,' He pressed his hands against his forehead, which was aching dully. He was aware, too, of pain in his left arm and shoulder. As he stood up, he saw that Ebbutt's men had left him.

Ebbutt had given them a distasteful task, and they had carried it out without question and done it well; but they wanted no truck with the Toff. It was a heart-breaking situation, the silence of those two men bringing the truth home vividly to Rollison.

The police seemed to notice nothing strange. The one prisoner caught was taken to the local station, while Rollison, insisting that there was nothing much the matter with him, was taken to Scotland Yard. Once there he was found to have a two-inch razor gash in his right arm, and a badly bruised shoulder. Other than that, and abrasions left by a knuckle-duster, there was not a great deal wrong. As an attendant ministered to him, he was thinking again of Barrow, and of the man whose face had been familiar among the assailants. Where *had* he seen it before? A

thin, ugly face, with a broad mouth.

Rollison could not place him.

He asked for Grice.

'I don't think he's here,' said the attendant. 'He's working much harder than he should be, you know.'

'I'm not surprised,' admitted Rollison. 'I'll go up to his office,'

Grice was not in the office, but Inspector Ridgley, who was in charge of the Benson case as part of his responsibility for the night club in the West End, was sitting at his desk. Ridgley was a middle-aged, good-looking man. He lacked a sense of humour; but perhaps that was an asset in his particular work. He looked up as the door opened, and when he saw who it was, his expression changed – hardened, thought Rollison, and he was reminded again of Bill Ebbutt.

'No Grice?' asked Rollison, brightly.

'He's out.'

'So I observed,' said Rollison. He sank into a chair, feeling more shaky than he cared to admit. 'Have you any idea when he'll be back?'

'No,' said Ridgley, pointedly. 'Have you got a card?'

'Card?' echoed Rollison.

'Yes, a card. You take too much for granted,' went on Ridgley, gruffly. 'When people come in here they need a card unless they're members of the C.I.D. or the uniformed branch. Didn't you know that?'

Rollison looked at him curiously. 'Now you come to mention it, I did know it,' he admitted, 'but somehow no one has ever insisted that I should go through the formalities.'

'It's time they did,' said Ridgley, abruptly. 'Is there anything I can do for you, since you *are* here?

Rollison got up slowly.

'No,' he said. 'Nothing at all. Unless you can tell me the name of Benson's murderer.'

Ridgley looked at him with transparent dislike.

'Perhaps *you* can tell me why we weren't warned that Benson was in danger until an hour or more after he'd been killed,' he said. 'And perhaps you can explain how the Hammer got away from Milch Street. Come to think of it,' he went on, heavily sarcastic, 'there are a lot of questions I could ask you, Rollison, although that's Grice's job. I hope he does it,' he added, tartly.

A retort rose hotly to Rollison's lips, but he forced it back. What was the use? He had met too much open dislike and disapproval in the last few hours for it not to have had some accumulative effect.

He went out.

The stone corridors of the Yard struck cold; he had not noticed that when he had come in.

He passed men in the passages. One or two nodded, most of them looked away, yet all of them knew him by sight and normally they would have spoken.

Was Barrow behind it? But why should Barrow go out of his way to discredit him?

Rollison understood, now, why Grice had not been in touch with him that day. Grice might easily believe that he had deliberately let the Hammer go. It would be enough to cause ill-feeling. At the beginning of the case, Grice had been more than helpful, eager for co-operation. Now, a successful effort had been made to antagonise both police and East Enders.

That thought stuck in Rollison's mind.

At the flat, Jolly's eye immediately pounced on the bandaged arm.

'It's all right,' Rollison told him, a little impatiently. 'There are more serious things to natter about than that. Listen, Jolly; the Yard's now developed as big a grudge against me as that held by the East End.' He laughed mirthlessly. 'For all the good we're doing we'd better go back to Bournemouth.'

'There might be something in that, sir,' murmured Jolly.

Rollison frowned. 'Now what are you driving at?'

Jolly said: 'Well, sir, you would be able to take it easy for a few days, and I don't think that a rest would do you any harm. In fact I think it might clear your mind of a great deal of confusion.'

'Go on,' encouraged Rollison.

'You see, sir, I have noticed a cooling off, if I may put it like that, in the attitude of the police since we engaged Mr Higginbottom. I think that was the beginning of it. In the past Mr Grice never hesitated to confide, up to a point, but since Mr Higginbottom has been here, he has been more careful. Then again, sir, I took the liberty of telephoning Scotland Yard this evening, and I spoke to Inspector Ridgley. He was not friendly. I

have never had much regard for that particular officer,' went on Jolly, with dignity, 'but previously I had not found him impertinent. It gave me an inkling of this change in the official attitude, and after I heard what Mr Higginbottom had discovered this morning, I set to thinking, sir.'

'Produce the jewels of thought.'

'I would not myself, class them as jewels, sir,' said Jolly modestly, 'but one thing *does* stand out. It is this: a deliberate, and calculated attempt is being made to discredit you among your friends. But this affair did *not* begin as an attack upon the Hammer. You had no malice towards him. It was not, if I may say so, a matter of attempting to cleanse the East End of some of its unsavoury characters. Such a crusade, one could imagine, might well have incurred the disfavour of the Hammer and supporters of the Hammer, but not *this* particular case. Do you see the point I am trying to make, sir?'

After a long pause, Rollison said: 'Yes, Jolly, I think I do. Carry on.'

'Well, sir, if we recall the events since Miss Lancaster first came to see you, we find that first Mr Drayton disappeared, then a body which might or might not have been that of Mr Drayton was found. Nothing happened thereafter until the behaviour of Colonel Horniman became remarkable. This eventually took us to Bournemouth again. After the incidents in Bournemouth, we returned to London. You made a call on Dr Finnigan, with the disastrous consequences that we know, and —'

Rollison snapped his fingers, 'Got him!' he exclaimed.

Jolly raised his eyebrows.

'I don't quite understand you, sir. Whom have you got?'

Rollison laughed. 'There was a particularly nasty-looking specimen among those johnnies who attacked me tonight,' he said, 'I knew I'd seen him before, but couldn't place him. It's just come to me. He was the man who tried to get the brief-case away from here! So the attack was not a spontaneous anti-Toff demonstration at all. Thanks, Jolly, you've certainly given me something to think about.'

'I am glad to help clear up even the most trivial mystifications,' Jolly said, primly. 'It does seem to me, sir, that the *wise* plan would be to try to do that one by one, going over

all the old ground, as I have been attempting to do. Shall I go on, sir?'

Rollison nodded thoughtfully.

'You made personal, calls, then, on Dr Finnigan and Mrs Willis, and you saw Mrs Lenwell when you called on Ethel Kent. You also had Lenwell followed on his round of visits to the other people concerned in Horniman's projected company. Now, sir, *this* is what seems apparent to me. Something which happened at that time, and what it is I cannot imagine, made you *particularly* dangerous to the people concerned. From that moment onwards, these attempts to discredit you began. I am right, am I not?' he asked, a trifle anxiously.

'I believe you are,' said Rollison, thoughtfully. 'There's something in it, anyhow. But Ebbutt was friendly enough until last night, it was the Hammer incident which changed him.'

'That was a consequence of what had gone before, sir.'

'I'm not so sure. There would have been no trouble with the East End if I hadn't forced Ethel Kent to name the Hammer. But when the hammer was thrown in at the window, the Hammer – proper noun! – was also thrown at me. It was *too* obvious, Jolly.'

'I can only agree with you there, sir.'

'And then there's the matter of the police change of attitude,' Rollison went on. 'That had nothing to do with the Hammer at first. It began with Higginbottom, and was natural enough, I suppose. But I don't see how either of those things tie up with anything that happened in Bournemouth or what I did in London when I first came back.'

Jolly said slowly: 'And yet I feel there *is* a connection, sir. It has happened before, as you are aware. You have, I think, made a discovery of importance without realising the significance of it. And I cannot help feeling that the period while you were in Bournemouth is the important one – that, or the few hours immediately following your return.'

After a pause, Rollison said: 'You may be right. I'd better sleep on it, I think. Barrow worries me most, you know. Both transformations started with him.'

Jolly smiled rather sourly. 'I don't think you need pay much attention to Sergeant Barrow, sir,' he said. 'He is merely a conceited, swollen-headed young officer, in my opinion, who

has made progress too quickly and resents your interference. He thought he would get the Hammer last night, and had to blame someone for missing him. So, he blames you.'

Next morning, Rollison's arm was swollen and inflamed so badly that he allowed Jolly to send for a doctor. He was told that the arm must be lanced and that he would have to keep it in a sling for at least a week. The operation was painful. After it was over, Snub came in and commiserated with him and, when Rollison told him to sit down and stop looking sheepish, he confessed that it seemed to him that these troubles had started with his arrival, and that he was doing more harm than good. He wished he had been with Rollison the previous night; then they would have caught more than one of the blighters.

'As for the Hammer,' he added, gruffly. 'That man's poison, Mr Rollison.'

Rollison raised his eyebrows. 'You think the Hammer's our man, then?'

'I just can't see anyone indulging in a lot of skullduggery on the one hand and shelling out fortunes on the other unless he's making a good thing of it,' said Snub. 'I've got nothing to go on, of course, except what seems to me to be plain common-sense. Er—am I talking too much?' he asked anxiously.

Rollison said slowly: 'No, not a bit too much. The fact is, people *do* behave like that. Some of the most generous people in the East End *are* thieves. They spend freely and give freely after they've had a good haul. Not all of them, but enough to make the Hammer's story just possible. Get me Grice on the telephone, will you?'

That done, Rollison took the receiver and said cheerfully: 'Well, who's on the black list today?'

'You ought to know,' said Grice. 'I'm coming over to see you in about half an hour, let it keep until then.'

Chapter Twenty

Grice Rages

Grice arrived on time.

He came striding into the flat, his expression grim and uncompromising. It transpired that there had been more trouble with Meredith., but what had angered him most was the fact that Barrow was on the promotion list and thus in line for an inspectorship.

'I've come to the conclusion that Barrow is the most inefficient man we've got at the Yard,' Grice growled. 'His earlier successes must have been sheer luck.' He laughed at his own vehemence when he saw Rollison regarding him with mild surprise. 'I suppose the truth is that at the Yard they've been so tormented by gibes and sneers because of the crime wave that they're all on edge to snatch at the slightest chance to get the Hammer. Rightly or wrongly they now look on him as responsible for every murder and burglary in London.' He gave a harsh laugh. 'And as for you, Rolly, you're the villain of the century!'

'What have I been doing now? asked Rollison.

'The story is that when Barrow was tipped off about the Hammer's address, he was also told that you had an appointment with the Hammer that night. Barrow's convinced that you helped the Hammer to get away. The divisional people said there was no way in which you could have done that, but Meredith is looking for a scapegoat outside the Yard, and isn't above hoping that you did help him.' Grice paused, inquiringly.

'Barrow saw everything that I did,' Rollison murmured.

Grice looked at him for a moment, and then shrugged. 'Yes, I suppose so.'

'There's no suppose about it. And there is a curious feature about Sergeant Barrow,' remarked Rollison. 'Far be it from me to suspect a policeman, but he's not being very astute, you know. He gave Janet Piper to understand that it was I who

tipped the police off about the Hammer.'

'Is that the truth?' asked Grice, in a strained voice.

'Yes. But we'd better not assume the worst. Barrow's given to wild statements and exaggerated claims, you know, and he loses his temper easily. That much I've seen. A few words flung over his shoulder in the white-heat of temper might have given Janet the wrong impression. It's worth an inquiry, but no more.'

'I'll inquire all right,' Grice growled.

'Forgetting Barrow for the moment, what else have we got?' asked Rollison. 'One Hammer, or two – that's the crux of the question. I plump for two. One emphasising the velvet glove, the other the iron hand. And there are other things we might consider,' went on Rollison. 'This fear of being seen: that's clearly established. It *might* be the reason for the sudden crop of murders. Supposing, for instance, that Horniman, Finnigan and Benson had all three seen him, by accident if you like. Here was a man they knew, whose name they could give to the police, whom they could blackmail because they could disclose his identity. A good motive for murder, don't you think?'

Grice nodded.

'Then try this,' said Rollison. 'Would-be murder of Susan, of young Kent and, through framing her for Finnigan's murder, Ethel Kent. Ethel had offended through me, but Susan and Kent hadn't. Why are they dangerous? What do they know? We've said all this before,' Rollison went on, 'but we didn't really believe it. I believe it now. Both Susan and Kent know something about the Hammer, iron-hand version, and I think the thing they know is what the Hammer looks like.'

Grice said: 'I'm still not convinced.'

'Nothing else tallies with the known facts,' said Rollison. 'Nothing we know—' he broke off as Jolly came in with a registered package.

'The post, sir,' he said, and put it on the table.

Rollison looked at the package, frowning. He went over and touched it.

'What gives you the creeps about that?' Grice demanded.

'No creeps,' said Rollison, 'just an idea.' He opened the package. It contained a watch which had been with the repairers for some weeks. He held it to his ear, absently. 'Bill,' he murmured, 'of this I'm sure: Susan knows something *or* the

Hammer thinks she does. The attempt to kill her could only have been to keep her quiet. Agreed?'

'I'll allow that it's possible,' conceded Grice.

'And her flat was searched, remember. Was anything taken away?'

'She didn't report anything missing. I wish you'd tell me what you're driving at.'

Rollison laughed. 'I was wondering whether Susan ever received that registered letter which you once had. Remember it? There *might* have been something in that.' He dialled Susan's number. She came on the line immediately.

'No,' she said, when he had asked her about the letter. 'I didn't get any correspondence at all at the Lorne Hall Hotel.'

'Are you quite sure, Susan?'

'Positive.'

'Thanks,' said Rollison. He rang off, and turned to Grice. 'You see, Horniman could have taken it, pretending that he would give it to her. What did the hotel people say about the letter when you inquired about it?'

'I don't know,' said Grice. 'Barrow had that to do.'

'Did he do it?'

'I'll soon find out,' said Grice. 'And if he *didn't* make the inquiry …' he laughed shortly. *'No* inspectorship for Barrow!'

Rollison murmured: 'Dare you take me with you?'

'I'll risk it,' said Grice. The worst Meredith can do is to retire me!'

Barrow started when he saw Rollison in Grice's office.

He was not a bad looking man, with his curly hair and powerful figure. Until his gaze had alighted on Rollison, his manner was cocksure, but he quickly recovered his poise.

'Did you send for me?' No 'sir', no 'Mr Grice'.

'Yes, sergeant I asked you to find out from the Lorne Hall Hotel, Bournemouth, whether a registered letter had been delivered there for Miss Lancaster. Did you make the inquiry?'

There was a moment's pause, then: 'I—yes, of course,' said Barrow. 'Yes. There hadn't been a letter.'

'You're quite sure the matter wasn't forgotten?' insisted Grice.

'Of *course* I'm sure,' said Barrow, but he avoided Grice's eyes. 'You wouldn't expect the hotel to remember a thing like that,

anyhow, would you? They must have dozens of such letters.'

Grice said: 'I wouldn't expect some people to remember very much of anything.' He lifted the telephone. 'Get me the Lorne Hall Hotel, Bournemouth,' he said. 'Now, sergeant. I understand that you told Mrs Piper, the woman who owns the house where the Hammer lived, that you had been tipped off that he lived there by Mr Rollison.'

Barrow started. 'That—that's not true!'

'She has made a statement to that effect,' Grice said.

Barrow gulped. 'I didn't say anything of the kind. You wouldn't expect that kind of woman to tell you the truth, would you?'

Grice said coldly: 'There are liars in every walk of life, sergeant. What did you say to her that might have been construed into an accusation against Mr Rollison?'

A touch of insolence crept into Barrow's voice. 'It wasn't a case of an accusation, I might have said something about anyone who had anything to—er—to do with Rollison was asking for trouble, but—'

Grice said icily: 'You forget yourself, sergeant!' He was suddenly in a towering rage. For a moment they stared at each other, and then the telephone rang. Grice took off the receiver: 'Hallo … Hallo,' he said, and seemed to forget the others in the room. 'I am speaking from Scotland Yard, London … May I speak to the receptionist who was on duty on Monday, please … You are? Thank you … An inquiry was made from here about a registered letter addressed to Miss Susan Lancaster and possibly not delivered to her … *No* inquiry was made? Are you sure?' His voice sharpened. 'How can you be so sure … You've got it *there*?' he exclaimed, and then pulled himself up sharply. 'Thank you very much,' he said. 'I will arrange for it to be collected at once, thank you.'

He replaced the receiver slowly, then turned to Barrow, his voice, when he spoke, entirely devoid of expression.

'You are relieved of duty until further inquiries about your dereliction of duty can be made. Sergeant Barrow. Give me your card.'

Barrow drew in his breath. 'You—you've no right—'

'Damn you, man!' roared Grice, 'I'll see you drummed out of the Force if I have any more insolence from you. *Give me your*

card!' Sullenly, Barrow took out his wallet and extracted the card. Grice tossed it on the desk. 'That's all,' he growled. 'Now get out.'

Barrow said haltingly: 'I've got a right to appeal—'

'Appeal to whom you like,' snapped Grice.

As he spoke, the door opened. Rollison glanced towards it and saw the newcomer first.

Of all the callers, this was the last man he wanted to see, although he supposed that such a visit was to be expected. For the portly, frowning man who entered was Meredith, the Chief Constable. He stood dark and uncompromising, and his brows met when he saw Rollison.

Barrow swung round. 'Sir—'

'Be quiet, Barrow!' snapped Grice, and Meredith started at the harsh tone of his voice. 'Good afternoon, sir,' Grice said to Meredith. 'I have just stood Sergeant Barrow off the duty roster for negligence. He had instructions to make inquiries about an important matter of evidence, and failed to carry them out.'

Meredith said blankly: 'Oh.'

'Further, sir, he had admitted giving uncorroborated information to a suspected associate of the man known as the Hammer,' Grice went on, 'and I think there is little doubt, sir, that he has needlessly, and of neglect, confused a case already sufficiently complicated. I was about to write a formal request for an inquiry into his conduct.'

Meredith looked completely taken aback for a moment, then a mask came down over his face.

'You may go, Barrow.' Grice waited until the door had closed behind him and then turned back to Meredith as if they were the best friends in the world. 'I'm sorry that was necessary, sir,' he said, 'but I'm afraid Barrow had been making mischief in several ways. Oh—you know Mr Rollison, don't you?'

'I *do,'* said Meredith, coldly. He looked at Rollison's sling. 'And I must say that I am surprised to see him here, in view of —'

'He has come to make a statement,' said Grice smoothly, 'and I would like your permission to have it taken down, sir.'

'Of course,' said Meredith. He looked at Rollison expectantly.

'I'll ring for a stenographer,' said Grice, and pressed a bell. 'It will cover his version of the Horniman murder at Bournemouth,'

Grice went on, ‘I was anxious to get all the details exactly right, sir.’

‘Very proper,’ murmured Meredith.

‘I will have a copy sent up to you, sir, as soon as it has been transcribed,’ promised Grice.

After a moment’s hesitation, Meredith said: ‘Very well, Superintendent.’ He turned to Rollison. ‘You understand, I am sure, that the tightening up of regulations in no way reflects upon the help you have rendered us in the past, Mr Rollison.’

Rollison smiled dryly: ‘It hadn’t occurred to me to believe otherwise,’ he declared.

‘Good, good!’ said Meredith. He nodded, and went out, and Grice smiled broadly, now on top of the world.

‘That’s settled him for the time being,’ he said. ‘And I haven’t finished with Barrow, yet.’ he added, ‘the man may just be a conceited fool, or he *may* have been got at. I don’t want to think so, but—’ he broke off, shrugging his shoulders.

‘Haven’t you forgotten something?’ asked Rollison.

Grice frowned. ‘I don’t think so. I—Great Scott, yes! That registered letter.’

He picked up the telephone, and was soon talking to Carr, in Bournemouth.

Chapter Twenty-One

Late Delivery

The front-door bell rang and Susan jumped up excitedly.

'Don't expect too much from this letter,' Rollison counselled her. 'It might be nothing to do with Bruce.'

Carr came in first, and looked concerned when he saw Rollison's arm.

'A trifle,' Rollison assured him. 'What are *you* doing away from the Sunny South?'

'I had to come to town sooner or later,' said Carr, 'and I thought I would bring the letter myself. After all, this *is* partly my job, you know.' He greeted Susan, who watched him tensely as he took the letter from his pocket. Grice came in hurriedly and closed the door.

The letter looked ordinary enough. Only the blue-pencilled lines across it made it different from a dozen others lying on Rollison's desk. It was addressed in block capitals, and the blue registration slip was marked: *'W. Kensington*.'

Carr held the letter towards Susan.

'Please open it,' she said, in a strained voice.

Carr slit the envelope, and, under the tense gaze of the other three, took out several folded sheets of paper. Each one was covered with closely-written handwriting, and Susan leapt to her feet.

'That's Bruce's writing!' she exclaimed.

She watched with tense expectancy as Carr separated the sheets. All appeared to be very much the same and now Rollison could see that there were many rows of figures, arranged in what looked like some sort of formulae. Susan took each sheet and glanced at it, looking for a personal letter; but there was none.

'Now we *are* making progress,' Rollison said, as much to cheer her up as for any other reason. 'Word from Bruce since the fire tells quite a story.' He took the envelope. 'Dated last Saturday,'

he said. ‘Is that in Bruce’s hand too, Susan?’

She studied the block letters closely.

‘I can’t be sure,’ she said.

Carr looked up. ‘There might be a code, you know,’ he commented. ‘Drayton may have known that he could not get a letter away, so hid a message in these formulae. They concern his new inventions, I suppose.’

Susan was recovering from her disappointment, she even smiled. ‘Do you really think it’s proof, that he was alive after that body was found, Rolly?’

‘It’s a reasonable assumption,’ Rollison assured her. ‘Who else would post them to you?’

‘If he could post those, why couldn’t he post something else?’ asked Susan, reasonably. ‘Can we find out for certain that he posted them?’

‘We can test the envelope for prints,’ said Grice. ‘I don’t think there’s much hope of finding out who took the receipt from the post office. If Mr Drayton did himself, then it means that he was in London last Saturday. But if that were so, surely he would have telephoned you.’

‘You’d think so,’ said Susan. ‘I was hoping so much that—’ she broke off. ‘Is there anything else?’ she demanded, abruptly.

‘Not just now,’ Grice said.

‘How long are these policemen going to follow me about?’ Susan asked, and gave a nervous little laugh. ‘It makes me feel almost as if I’m under suspicion myself.’

‘It’s for your safety only,’ Grice assured her. ‘As soon as the case is finished, they won’t worry you any more.’

‘They don’t exactly *worry* me,’ said Susan.

But Rollison, for greater safety, sent Snub after the girl when she left, to see her home. Then he returned to the sitting-room, where Carr was looking at the wall of exhibits and Grice was poring over the contents of the registered envelope. He glanced up and met Rollison’s eye.

‘I think we’re thinking the same thing,’ said Rollison. ‘How do these papers compare with those which Horniman dished out to his partners? Isn’t it time we had a look at them?’

Grice chuckled. ‘Meredith’s in a more amenable frame of mind at the moment,’ he said. ‘I’ll fix it.’

Exactly three hours later, a little after two o’clock, the last of

the papers which Horniman had given as security to his financial partners, was in the flat.

There were five sheets in the letter which had been sent to Susan; there were fourteen of Horniman's sheets. The handwriting was different and a quick comparison proved that although there were superficial resemblances, the two sets were not the same. Twenty minutes after they had reached that conclusion, a little, flat-faced man who spoke with a broad Lancashire accent arrived, and Grice introduced him as Townley, London representative of one of the big Lancashire textile companies. He took one look at Horniman's papers, and laughed.

'Ah don't think you need worry about them,' he said. 'Looks to me someone copied them out of an elementary text-book on plastics. You surely didn't send for me for *those*, Mr Grice.'

Grice handed him the other sheets.

'Try this lot,' he said.

Townley glanced at them casually at first; then his interest quickened. Suddenly he pushed his way to the table, pulled out a chair and sat down. Rollison had rarely seen so remarkable a change in a man. One moment amused and rueful, the next he was completely absorbed in the papers in front of him. He spent at least ten minutes on the first sheet, then pushed his chair back and looked up, his eyes glistening.

'They'll make *Silva-Sheen* half the price to produce,' he declared, hoarse with excitement. 'They're Drayton's work, Ah'll be bound, Drayton was working on these lines. When producers get *these*, they'll go up in the air all right!'

'Will they injure the trade?' demanded Rollison.

'Injure it, man? They'll make it! In a year, wi' these methods, we'll double our export trade.' There was no doubt of his excitement or sincerity. 'Who owns them now?' he demanded.

Grice said: 'Drayton may be alive.'

'If he's alive there'll be no need to worry,' said Townley, 'but gi' two or three companies these papers and they'll monopolise the trade. Are there any copies?'

'Not to our knowledge,' Grice said.

'Then put them in a safe place, where no one can touch them,' Townley cried. 'Gi' them to the Board of Trade as soon as ye know there are no copies,' He took out a cigarette, but was

too excited to light it. ‘Ah always knew Drayton had something in him,’ he said, ‘man’s a genius if ever there was one.’

There seemed no further doubt that Drayton had been kidnapped for his new formulae. Thus the motive came back to the first one suspected, and for the next half hour, the Hammer, the East End and all that went with them faded to the background of Rollison’s mind. That Horniman had tricked his investors was now clear enough. Grice, interviewing them, had found that all had been convinced of Horniman’s honesty. All, that is, excepting Jane Lenwell and her husband, and Mrs Willis on whom he had brought pressure to bear. The only two people who might have known more of what Horniman had been doing, Benson and Finnigan, had been killed.

Grice said: ‘The *only* contact now is the Hammer.’

‘Who’s built an impregnable wall about himself,’ said Rollison.

‘Surely there’s *something* you can do,’ Carr said.

Rollison, sitting back and nursing his arm, murmured: ‘We must find something out of nothing. What are the known facts now? Someone thought that Susan had received that letter, and tried to kill her to prevent her from bringing it to us. Her room was searched at the flat, remember. That she was lured away so that could be done suggests that there are no copies. It also suggests that someone, and we’ve got to assume that it’s the Hammer, wants to get a monopoly of the new methods. So it begins to make sense, and our hand’s stronger than it was.’ He laughed. ‘It’s a curious fact, Bill, that while murder was being done to get hold of these papers, they were waiting for anyone to collect from the reception desk at Lorne Hall Hotel.’

‘Now tell us something that will help,’ suggested Grice.

‘There are two lines which you can see as well as I can,’ Rollison told him. ‘First Mrs Lenwell, who visited the Hammer Club, remember, and saw Benson there – she’s the only one we know who ever had any contact with Benson. And the other is Janet Piper. You’re having her watched, I hope.’

‘Closely.’

‘The Hammer might get in touch with her again,’ said Rollison, ‘but it’s a slender hope, I think he’ll decide that he’s safer away. Which leaves us with one other even more slender

hope.'

'And that is?'

'Something we've forgotten far too long. Our plump man, who tried to get Susan, and did get Horniman,'

'We've no name. We haven't even a good description of him,' Grice pointed out. 'Plump men abound.'

'So they do,' said Rollison, cheerfully. 'But we know now what the plotters are after. Lock those papers up in the vaults at the Yard, Bill, and don't let Barrow know you've got them.'

'Barrow won't worry us again,' Grice assured him. 'I've given chapter and verse to Meredith. It's shocked him. There's a chance that Barrow's been taking bribes, but I hink he's no more than a conceited fool.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'Where's Higginbottom?'

'Gone with Susan.'

'He's been a long time, hasn't he?' asked Grice.

'He'll be back,' said Rollison.

But the question had made him uneasy. When Grice had gone, he telephoned Susan, who told him that Snub had seen her to the door and left her; that was nearly an hour ago. The police were still watching her, she said, and she felt quite safe. She had now got beyond the point of asking whether there were any news, and Rollison sensed her misery and dejection. With every day, hope was receding.

He talked with Jolly …

At every sound of footsteps in the street, he thought it would be Snub, but when darkness fell Snub had not returned.

'Jolly,' said Rollison. 'I like this less and less. If we wanted to, we could fashion a formidable case against him, you know.'

'I have thought of that, sir, and firmly rejected it,' Jolly told him, mildly. 'I just *cannot* believe that he would have betrayed us. I admit the evidence, and yet I feel sure he will re-appear, with a perfectly satisfactory explanation of what has happened. I wish that were our only anxiety, sir.'

Rollison gave him a shrewd look. 'Well, out with it. What's weighing heaviest on your shoulders?'

'Your visit to the Hammer, sir. If that young woman, Mrs Piper, *should* be detained and questioned, she might tell the police the whole truth. That would be extremely unfortunate, sir. And since *she* spread the rumour that you had betrayed the

Hammer, I find it hard to believe that she is wholly reliable.'

'Hmm,' said Rollison. 'You may have something there.' He got up. 'I'm going to drown my sorrows,' he said. 'Stay in until I come back. Jolly.'

'May I ask you where you are going, sir?'

'I've just remembered that I haven't yet visited the Hammer Club,' Rollison said. 'Damn it. Jolly, there must be a line somewhere!'

'You won't try to drive, with that arm, sir, will you?'

'No, I'll get a cab if necessary.'

The Hammer Club was only twenty minutes' walk from Gresham Terrace, and Rollison decided to walk. His thoughts were heavy and depressing. Why had Snub chosen to disappear just then. How strong was the weight of evidence against him? It seemed to Rollison that he was being pursued by demons of doubt in which his own judgement of people was being brought sharply up against contrary evidence. He believed in Snub; he liked Janet Piper; he had been inclined to trust the Hammer. Yet no one in his senses would refuse to admit that this confidence might have been misplaced. The sensible thing was to assume that the Hammer was the man responsible, that Janet Piper knew it, that they had deliberately conspired to discredit him in the East End, and that Snub was somehow involved.

The Hammer Club – and Benson. If that man who had sat in his living-room had killed Benson, he had come fresh from the killing. Take away what he, Rollison, knew of the man personally, and he would not have any hesitation in saying that the Hammer was the murderer.

Well he now knew what the other Hammer, if he existed, had been looking for: Drayton's new formulae.

Rollison reached the Club and went in. 'Was he a member?' asked an attendant.

'A friend had told him,' murmured Rollison. The entrance fee, he was told, would be five pounds. He paid it, and walked up a narrow flight of stairs. A band could be heard playing above him. Not a very good one, decided Rollison.

He passed a telephone booth. A man was standing in it with his back towards him. It had a familiar look about it. Confound it, *everyone* looked familiar! The little bowler-hatted man, whom he had placed, the plump man with the brief-case—

The telephone-booth door opened, and the man emerged.

It was Snub.

He said easily: 'I've just been ringing you. Jolly told me you were coming here. How did you know?'

'Know what?' asked Rollison.

'Don't you know?'

Rollison said gently: 'No, in point of fact I don't. What are you talking about?'

'There are times when a fellow has to act on his own initiative,' protested Snub, 'This was one of them. I had an urge to try to see Janet Piper again,' Snub went on. 'Couldn't resist it. And I popped over to Milch Street.'

'Not friendly?'

'Almost wept on my shoulder,' declared Snub. 'Told me that the Hammer was in danger. Had a message from a man she'd never heard of, called himself Kennedy. She was to meet him here at half-past nine tonight. So here I am. Apparently he breathed fire and gunpowder about what he would do to the Hammer. Says he knows his hiding place.'

'Go on.'

'And Janet, whatever the rights of the case, is in a ferment of anxiety. Oh, and she's stopped blaming you for the Hammer's misadventure.'

'Really,' said Rollison, dryly.

'This Kennedy man told her it was he who had given the Hammer away. Pal of Benson's apparently. But I mustn't ramble on,' declared Snub. 'Wait until you've *seen* Kennedy.'

'Is he here?'

'Oh, yes. Had him pointed out,' said Snub. 'Shocking prices charged here,' he added, as he led Rollison into a smoke-laden room, filled with a crowd of dancers.

Janet was sitting at a corner table, alone.

'Watch her,' Snub advised.

Rollison decided to do just that. He sat down at an unoccupied table, and gave an order to a tired and harassed waiter. An hour in this fug, thought Rollison, would weary anybody.

Then the music stopped, and the dance-band leader gave a theatrical wave to the crowd. He was a biggish, plump man, fair-haired. His evening dress was well-cut, and he looked

supremely happy and confident, as if a saxophone and hot music were all that he asked of life.

Snub nudged Rollison's elbow.

'Kennedy. Remember him?'

Rollison said softly: 'Yes, Snub. The second man who applied for your job.'

'Got it in one! Give him a wig and glasses and he measures up —'

'To the brief-case merchant,' Rollison exclaimed. 'Get out, Snub, and telephone the police. Not from here, from outside. Hurry!'

Chapter Twenty-Two

Kennedy

There was no doubt that it was the same man. He had once entered Rollison's flat, full of his own importance, and had been the only one of the applicants to show resentment when Rollison had not engaged him on the spot. With a little greasepaint here and there, dyed hair or a wig, could become the man of the brief-case easily enough. That he was the same man, Rollison felt quite sure.

Kennedy left the platform and, bowing right and left, joined Janet at her table.

They sat talking for some time, then a waiter went up to Kennedy with a folded slip of paper. The dance-band leader looked up, sharply. *The waiter turned and pointed towards Rollison.*

Kennedy jumped up.

Rollison pushed his chair back, and walked towards the man, ignoring the staring people, the waiters who were watching him, the intense interest of the other members of the band. In that moment tension had sprung into the room, tension so great that everyone seemed affected. It was caused by the expression on Kennedy's face, the hardness on Rollison's, as he moved forward.

Rollison was thinking: 'Snub will be ten minutes, the police perhaps twenty. And I haven't got a gun.' Rollison pushed his way past another table. His arm was throbbing painfully. If it came to a fight, he would have little chance against the man. Were the waiters sympathetic towards Kennedy? And what of the band?

Suddenly Kennedy panicked. He picked up a champagne bottle and flung it at Rollison. Someone screamed. Janet, attempting to get to her feet, was pushed back and fell heavily.

Kennedy raced for the door.

Rollison rushed after him, but the bandsmen, deliberately

obstructive, delayed him a precious few minutes. By the time he reached the stairs, Kennedy's footsteps could be heard on the pavement.

Then he heard a shout, and recognised Snub's voice.

Hope rose again. Only for a short time, however, for as Rollison reached the street it was to see Snub picking himself up from the ground. There was no sign of Kennedy. Snub dusted himself down, his expression one of extreme acerbity.

'I should have kept out of sight,' Rollison said consolingly. The fault was his, he could not blame Snub, who took out a cigarette case, and then put it back unopened.

'What are you going to do about Janet?' he asked.

'What do you want me to do?'

'Well, I'm on her side,' Snub said. 'Whatever the truth about the Hammer, she believes in him. But *Kennedy* isn't the Hammer you met, is he?'

Rollison shook his head.

'Then it's beginning to look as if you were right about there being two of them,' Snub said. 'Look here, can't we pitch a story? I saw the plump man and followed him here and hung about until I could be sure it was the same fellow? After all, the police will blame me for not sending for them earlier, whatever we do about Janet. And she's got quite a story. Shall we cover her?' When Rollison did not reply immediately he urged: 'You've backed your judgement so far, and it seems to be turning out all right. Give her a break.'

'All right,' said Rollison, slowly, 'we'll give her a day or two.'

He was not surprised that Grice made no complaints when he heard what had happened, and seemed to accept Snub's story without reservations. Little information had been forthcoming from the staff at the Hammer Club. The 'guests' had made a conceited rush for their hats and coats as soon as Rollison had left, scenting a raid. The staff was sullen. The bandsmen declared that they had no idea what Kennedy had done, but he was a good leader, they had protected him against Rollison, not against the police.

The hunt for Kennedy was stepped up.

He had not gone to his flat, which was near the Hammer Club, but piece by piece the evidence was amassed against him.

The servant at his flat remembered Horniman and Dr Finnigan; yes, they had been frequent callers. Other things were found: a rubber stamp of the Hammer's trade mark, some of the proceeds of recent smash-and-grab raids and, the most significant of all, a list of names and addresses. Mrs Willis was on the list; so were the Lenwells; so were the Kents. Against each name was the information which had been used against them. It was a list which would have fed Kennedy with material for blackmail for a lifetime.

All these entries were in Horniman's handwriting.

But there was nothing about Bruce Drayton, nor was there a clue as to Kennedy's present whereabouts.

Grice was busy most of the following day, but came to the flat towards evening. He was disappointed because Kennedy was still at large, but the find at the flat was enough to please both him and Meredith. The back of the organisation was broken, he said.

Rollison dissented. 'He's still got his workers, Bill. And he's still got the cover which the Hammer's reputation gives him.'

Grice laughed. 'I tell you he's on the run, Rolly. The incredible thing is that he dared to play at the club '

'Oh, I don't know. Who would suspect a band leader? Without his disguise, he wasn't at all like the man with the brief-case. His only risk was that Susan or I should see and recognise him. The fact that I did, is largely thanks to Snub.'

Grice nodded. 'Yes, Higginbottom's all right.'

'What about Janet Piper?' asked Rollison, as if absently.

'We've talked to her, but we haven't got anything new,' Grice admitted. 'You've had a shot at her through Higginbottom, haven't you?'

'Yes,' said Rollison. 'I'll have a word with her again, but we'd better let it rest for a day or two.'

It was clear that Grice had no idea that Janet had been at the Hammer Club. She had shaken off the policeman who had been following her when she left her house, and she had returned after a couple of hours saying she had been to see a film. It had been reported as a routine matter.

Grice left soon afterwards, and Snub grinned.

'No suspicions there,' he said. 'Janet's good! I know one thing – she's so scared in case Kennedy does know where the Hammer

is that she'll let us know at once if anything's in the wind.'

'We can't leave it to chance much longer,' Rollison said. 'We've gone so far that we'll have to go further, and see her. I'd better go tonight. With luck I'll slip the police.' He shrugged. 'If Meredith really knew—'

There were footsteps outside, the footsteps of a woman in a hurry. Rollison thought: 'Is this Janet?' but knew as soon as Jolly opened the door and he heard the woman's voice that it was neither Janet nor Susan. Then Jolly came in with unusual haste. Behind him was Susan's maid.

'She's run away!' she gasped, 'she has run away again! She had a message—'

There had been a telephone call from a man, who had told Susan to meet him on Putney Heath. That much Rollison was able to learn from the maid. Susan had gone wild with excitement, crying that Bruce was alive. She had rushed off, followed by the watching police; but a man had impeded the policeman, deliberately he thought, and Susan had disappeared.

Full circle, thought Rollison, gloomily. Everything was known, except the solution to the first mystery; and the whereabouts of the young couple.

It was easy to understand Susan's frame of mind. She had looked to Rollison and the police, and they had failed her. Her spirits had drooped until they were at the lowest ebb. No news of Bruce, just an empty life, an empty future … and suddenly, a message, a promise, an assurance that he was alive.

Snub said: 'Well, if Kennedy got her away, he wants something.'

'Yes, Drayton's papers,' Rollison said. 'They're the trump card.'

'Then we *might* hear—' began Snub. The telephone bell interrupted him.

Snub reached for the receiver. There was a long pause, and then with a sharp: 'Hold on,' he thrust the telephone into Rollison's hand. 'Kennedy,' he said. 'I *think*.'

The voice came clearly. 'Miss Lancaster wants to speak to you.'

Chapter Twenty-Three

Back to Bruce

The pause seemed a long one. During it Rollison convinced himself that it was Kennedy who had spoken. Jolly had slipped out of the room and was doubtless listening in on the extension. Then Susan spoke. ‘Rolly, Rolly, listen. Bruce *is* alive. I’ve seen him.’

Rollison’s heart leapt. ‘That’s the best news I’ve heard for a long time. Where are you?’

‘I mustn’t say. Rolly, you know those papers, the papers in the registered letter?’

‘Yes.’

‘I must get them,’ Susan said. ‘They’re mine, they were sent to me.’ Her voice was hoarse, he believed that she was very near to tears. ‘They—they want them, they’ll release Bruce if they get them. Rolly, he looks—dreadful. He’s so ill. You *must* get them for me somehow.’

Rollison said promptly: ‘Yes, I can manage that.’

Her voice rose. ‘You will? Oh, Rolly, I was so afraid that you might say you couldn’t, that you’d have to tell the police. *Don’t* tell the police, whatever you do, if—’

Rollison thought: ‘The old, old story, threats and menaces.’ ‘How am I to get them to you?’

‘You’re to send them by special messenger to Woking golf course,’ said Susan. ‘A man will be waiting for them by the club house. He’ll be there at half-past ten tonight.’ She caught her breath. ‘Rolly, you won’t do anything—make any attempt to trap the man, will you? You know how Horniman was killed, how quickly he died. If—if they don’t get the papers tonight, they will give Bruce an injection. He—he looks so ill, Rolly, he must have had a terrible time. You won’t fail me, will you?’

‘No,’ Rollison promised her.

After a pause, a man’s voice said: ‘You’d better not, Rollison.’

Then the receiver was hung up.

Jolly came hurrying in from the hall, his face set in stern disapproval. ‘You can’t let him get away with it, sir.’

Rollison said: ‘No. The question is, how are we to prevent it?’ He smoothed his hair. ‘I had to tell her that it would be all right, I’ve no doubt the man was listening. Kennedy!’ He laughed, explosively. ‘What’s the time?’

‘Nearly nine o’clock.’

Snub said: ‘What will you do? Make up a dummy packet of papers? They *might* release him on the strength of that.’

‘I think they’ll know the real things when they see them,’ Rollison said, ‘Woking club house and half-past ten. We could have the place surrounded by police, there are plenty of bushes about for concealment, but you may be sure of one thing: Kennedy himself won’t come.’ He drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair. ‘We can have the man followed by the police.’

‘Isn’t it the obvious thing to do?’ asked Snub.

Jolly murmured: ‘So very obvious that it is dangerous. Two people are in acute peril.’

Rollison looked up. ‘Two?’ he asked. ‘Thousands, Jolly. Kennedy is preparing to step into the Hammer’s shoes. The East End is primed for it. The indications are there for the world to see. Here is a man prepared to use the Hammer’s goodwill to his own advantage. It might mean the biggest outbreak of crime we’ve known for decades. And if the East End side with the man they *think* is the Hammer, catastrophe will follow. I’m not exaggerating.’

‘The two things still seem so disconnected,’ Snub said.

‘They’re connected all right, but there aren’t two things but three,’ Rollison assured him. ‘Blackmail, and we’ve seen plenty of evidence of that. An East End crime wave, and a monopoly of the new material. *That* will give a man power in three different spheres, Snub. Nothing disconnected here. All drawn closely together by the one thing – a desire for power. By telling Grice what has happened and having the golf course watched, we may kill Susan and Bruce and lose Kennedy. But if Kennedy gets the genuine papers, he’ll think that I’ve done just what he wanted. If there’s a weakness in him, it’s the weakness of conceit.’ He stirred restlessly in his chair. ‘Yet I still don’t see what we can, do but tell Grice.’

‘Grice has the papers, hasn’t he?’

'Yes.'

'So you *can't* produce the genuine article,' said Snub. He stood up, as restless as Rollison. 'Can *I* help? I'll gladly have a shot. After all, if you can find out where Bruce and Susan are and get them away, we'll have made a start.'

Jolly looked at him witheringly.

Rollison sat still for a long time, and then said: 'I think I'll go and see Kennedy. Without the papers, without pretending that I've got them. It will gain time, and it might produce results.' He laughed. 'It's come to a pretty pass when I'm as empty of ideas as that.'

'You'll just be walking into the lion's den,' objected Snub.

'Maybe. But I can leave traces,' said Rollison. He glanced at his watch. 'I think I'll drive out there on my own,' he said. 'You go out later, Snub, and wait near the club house. Jolly, at half-past ten, ring up Grice and tell him what I've done. We'll try one of the old tricks, I'll have a pocketful of rice and sprinkle it at strategic points. Tell Grice to have his men keep their eyes open for it.'

Snub said: 'Look here, this is just asking for trouble. You won't help anyone, you'll only get yourself into a jam. No one will notice a trail of *rice.'*

'You're quite right,' Rollison said. 'There isn't a chance – unless Kennedy makes a mistake. He hasn't made a serious one yet, except playing in that band and applying for my job. He thought if he could get the job he would be able to find out what I was doing, what lines I was working on. Then he would have walked out on me. It was smart enough, he *is* smart, but he's bound to slip up sooner or later. I might be able to make him do it, but to do that I must meet him.'

Rollison drew up on the road which led across Woking Common. There was no moon, but there was a row of lights along the main road, and the stars were bright. Yet when he left the Talbot and walked towards the club house, which was a small building looking no more than a blurred shape against the sky-line, it was dark enough. Bushes loomed on either side, while now and again he heard the stealthy movement of some creature of the fields. Those rustling sounds were close by, while the sounds of traffic seemed a long way off, as if in a

different world.

Rollison reached the club house, and looked at his watch. It was twenty-five minutes past ten.

The seconds dragged by, slowly enough for him to wonder just what would come of an escapade that was as foolish as Susan's, and yet which he felt was the only thing to be done.

He heard footsteps.

He did not move, did not even turn his head, though the steps were coming from behind him. They drew nearer. A man's voice said softly: 'Rollison?'

Rollison turned at last, and confronted a tall, indeterminate shape, the only thing definite about it being a scarf covering mouth and chin. The old tricks, he thought dryly, simple but effective, but how one tired of them!

'Have you got those papers?'

'No.'

The man drew in his breath. 'What the devil are you playing at?'

'The police have the papers,' Rollison said. 'There's no possibility of me getting hold of them.'

'You said—'

'I'm telling you,' Rollison said. 'What are you going to do about it?'

The man was taken aback. It was obvious that he did not know what to do in this emergency. So, whoever had sent him had been convinced that Rollison would do everything that Susan had told him to do. He wondered bleakly, whether there was any chance at all of finding Susan and Bruce.

The man said: 'I was told to collect them, he didn't say what I was to do apart from that. You—you haven't told the police, have you?'

'No,' said Rollison.

'How do I know whether to believe you or not?'

'You don't,' said Rollison shortly. 'The only thing for you to do is to take me to Kennedy.'

The man stood silent.

'Does he live far from here?'

'None of your business.' A sullen note had crept into the man's voice. He was on edge, that much was clear, and started looking about him. *Was* he alone?

Rollison moved towards him.

'Keep away!' the other said, in sudden alarm. 'Don't you try any funny business, Rollison. I've got a gun.' He turned away suddenly. 'Wait here,' he said. Now the wind was cutting across the Common, and Rollison shivered. His arm was aching dully; he remembered Snub's voice: 'It's *asking* for trouble.'

The man came back. 'Go ahead of me,' he said. One behind the other, they walked round the club house. Another man, as indeterminate as the first, was standing there.

'So you think you're clever, Rollison.'

'No, not clever,' Rollison said, 'but: perhaps not quite so foolish as some,'

'Then you'd better go back and get those papers,'

'No one can get them,'

'So you say.'

'Naturally it is I who say it. You are hardly in a position to do so. Now perhaps you will stop bandying words and tell Kennedy I wish to speak with him.'

For some reason Rollison's spirits rose. He glanced at his watch.

'The police were told where I was meeting you, just five minutes ago.'

'If the police—'

Rollison said sharply: 'I'm giving you plenty of time. Even the local police can't be here for another ten minutes.'

Sullenly the man said: 'You'd better come with me.' He turned down the road that crossed the Common, and soon they came upon a stationary car. Rollison was told to get inside. He smiled to himself in the darkness as he let fall a few grains of rice.

A scarf was tied over his eyes.

Thus blindfolded, Rollison sat back as the driver went off at a good speed. As far as he could judge, they were going towards Guildford. Then the car turned off the main road. Rollison suddenly lurched towards the window and wound it down. 'Air,' he gasped, 'must have air!'

'Close that window!' snapped his companion.

Rollison closed it clumsily, as one stricken by nausea. In the process more rice was dropped. If the police followed that route they would find it though it would be daylight before they could be expected to do so and report to Grice. Rice – Grice. He

laughed.

'What's funny?' growled his companion.

'You,' said Rollison. 'I haven't been in a situation like this for years.'

The driver gave a non-commital grunt and took a couple of left turnings. The suspicion leapt into Rollison's mind that the man was deliberately driving in circles to confuse him. More turns confirmed it. Then they had a long, straight run, for ten minutes or more. A sharp turn right took them to a hill. The tyres crunched on gravel, the man changed gear and then stopped.

Rollison managed to drop a few more grains of rice before he was pushed forward. He stumbled against a step. A man gripped his arm, to steady him, and he was led inside the house. They went up a staircase, reaching a landing.

Rollison heard a murmur of voices. Then a door opened, and he was led into a room.

The scarf was pulled from his eyes, and he stood face to face with Kennedy.

Beside him stood Susan.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Kennedy

This was the real Kennedy, without disguise. He seemed young to be at the head of a complex organisation. He was smiling, though without amusement, and he kept one hand in his pocket. Susan, pale-faced, neither moved nor spoke. The man who had driven the car from the golf course stood by the door, as if in readiness for any attempt at escape.

Kennedy said: 'What have you done to your arm?'

'Have you never heard of razor slashers?' asked Rollison.

Kennedy shrugged. 'You asked for all you got. Don't invite more. What's this about the police having those papers?'

'It would have been an elementary exercise of intelligence on your part to have guessed that they were now in the possession of the police,' Rollison said. 'They were much too important to be left around.'

Rollison saw at once that Kennedy had, in fact, expected to get the papers. Now his eyes narrowed, and when he spoke there was a hard obstinacy in his voice.

'Rollison, you're going to get those papers for me somehow, don't make any mistake about that. But in case you've got ideas, let me show you something.' The man at the door opened it, and Kennedy led Rollison up another flight of stairs. Here was a second landing, and opening from it, three doors. The man who had followed them inserted a key in the lock of one of them, turned it, and stood aside.

Kennedy pushed Rollison in.

It was a small, bare room, furnished with a camp bed, a chair and a wash-stand. On the bed was a man whom Rollison hardly recognised. His face was gaunt, his eyes were staring from his head, and he was pitifully thin. There was an ugly bruise over one eye. Rollison looked at him long and searchingly before he recognised Bruce Drayton.

'Hallo, Rolly.' His voice was weak, but there was an echo of

laughter in it. Rollison moved forward to the edge of the bed.

'Tough time, Bruce?'

'Not too good,' said Bruce Drayton. 'I'm afraid I look rather a wreck. What are the chances of getting away?' he asked.

'Pretty thin,' said Rollison.

'Why did you come here?'

'I thought I might make a bargain with Kennedy,' said Rollison. 'It was worth trying.'

'I shouldn't make any bargain with him,' said Bruce. 'He wouldn't keep it. The man doesn't know how to honour his word or how to tell the truth. I was the fool for being taken in. 'We worked together in the same laboratory once. But does it matter?'

Kennedy, standing in the background, now went to the wash-stand and picked up a small box. Rollison watched him as he took out a hypodermic syringe and held it up against the light; it was half full of a pale liquid similar to that in the syringe which had been taken from his brief-case.

'Recognise this stuff, Rollison? One jab, and Drayton will go out. Another, and the girl will follow him. I'm not fooling, and I want those papers. Can you get them?'

'No one can get them.'

Bruce said: 'That's one good thing. Rolly, if things work out better than you expect, and you find out who posted that letter for me, go easy on him – or her,' he added, and Rollison was astonished at his spirit. 'Not all of Kennedy's people are quite such swine as he.'

Kennedy said: 'Finnigan posted that letter, and he won't need any help from the police. I dealt with him personally.' He stepped to Bruce's side, with the syringe in his hand, and actually let the needle scratch Bruce's arm. Rollison's teeth clenched, but he did not move and Bruce kept quite still.

'Just *one* dose, Rollison,' and Kennedy broke off.

'All very interesting,' said Rollison. 'I told you that I had a proposition to make, Kennedy.'

'Let's hear it.'

Rollison said: 'What the police don't know is that *I* opened that registered letter at Susan's flat. I took out the papers and copied them, then put them back.' The lie came out convincingly. 'No one can get the originals, Kennedy, but I've

the copies and they should be as good.'

Kennedy swung round. 'Where are they?'

'*Very* safely hidden.'

Bruce said in a taut voice: 'Rolly, I've let them do this to me, I've taken everything they've given me, I've even let them get Susan, to *save* those papers. You don't know how important they are, they can help our export trade to—'

Kennedy leaned forward and slapped his face. It was a savage blow, and sent Bruce toppling sideways. He had hardly the strength to straighten up again.

'I want those papers, Rollison,' Kennedy said.

'You can have them – at a price,' said Rollison.

'Don't get above yourself, and run away with the idea that you can make conditions,' said Kennedy very softly.

Rollison laughed. 'No? Then listen to this one. When Drayton and Susan are back in London, *quite* safe, then you can have my copies. Not before. It's as simple as that.'

Bruce said hoarsely: 'Rolly—'

This time Kennedy did not seem to notice the emaciated man on the bed. He took a step towards Rollison and rested the point of the needle against his cheek. Rollison hardly felt it; and yet he remembered Horniman falling by the bookstall; he saw, in his mind's eye, Finnigan toppling from his chair on to the desk.

'I'm not bluffing,' Kennedy said. 'I don't trust you, Rollison.'

'I don't trust you,' said Rollison. He moved his head aside, and stood up. The man by the door stiffened, as if he expected trouble, but all Rollison said was: 'You've heard all I've got to say, Kennedy. You're only changing hostages, and by doing that you've got just one chance of getting what you want.'

Kennedy stared at him in silence for an appreciable time, and then said: 'I'll talk to you downstairs.'

Susan was still in the room below. Silent, white-faced, she sat there rigidly, her hands clasped in her lap. The driver of the car again stood guard over the door. Now that he had taken off his stocking mask, there was something vaguely familiar about him. There was no time to speculate, for Kennedy had started talking in a hard, tense voice.

'Now listen to me, Rollison. *I am going to have those papers.* I've worked hard for them. I've taken great risks. I'm not going to be fooled by you, and I'm not going to let this couple go in

order to get hold of them. They stay, until the papers are here. And I've got something else to tell you. The East End is *mine,* in future, do you understand? I've worked on it until it will do just what I want.' He laughed, slightly off-key, and Rollison wondered to what length his vanity would go. 'The Hammer started it, and I've taken it over. It's *my* beat in future. I've made sure that you won't get a welcome down there. More than that, I've made sure that if you show your face too often, you won't come back. Do you understand me?'

'Oh, yes, I understand you very well,' said Rollison dryly. 'Then that's all right,' said Kennedy, his vanity incapable of accepting any other interpretation. 'And as for that psalm-singing fool, the original Hammer, he's come near the end of his journey. I saw a chance and I didn't waste it. Just so that when I say I'll get a thing, I get it, I'll tell you what I've done. I started at the Hammer Club with Benson. Horniman came in and joined us. We started imitating the Hammer's methods, and it worked. We decided that the day would have to come when we must put the Hammer away. He took some finding, I can tell you.'

'I see,' murmured Rollison.

Kennedy laughed.

'There were four of us at first: Benson, Horniman, Finnigan and me. Finnigan helped with drugs. Horniman and Benson between them had been specialising in blackmail for a long time, and they had a list of monied people who gladly paid for silence. So, I looked after the robberies and the East End, Horniman and Benson did the blackmail, Finnigan was an odd-job man. It worked all right until they got too big for their boots. Horniman started it. He made contact with an American firm prepared to pay heavily for Drayton's secret methods. But Horniman tried to handle that by himself. He worked up a nice connection. He pretended to be floating a company. He put the black on some people to make them subscribe, he just talked the others into it. He didn't make a bad job of it, but he forgot one thing: he forgot to ask *me* to take a share.'

'Fatal,' murmured Rollison.

'You're right, it was fatal. He was working well. He'd got hold of Drayton and brought him here. He found a stooge for Drayton and burnt the stooge up. Do you know why he did that, Rollison?'

‘I’m not good at guessing,’ Rollison said.

‘But *I* am,’ said Kennedy vain-gloriously. ‘So I found out that the American company wanted to make sure that Drayton was dead, before they would buy. They didn’t want it said that they’d stolen his methods and they didn’t want him to be able to do the work again. So Horniman fixed it that Drayton appeared to be dead, but kept him here. And then he planned that, when the American company started producing the goods, he would tell them that he had Drayton, and *that* would improve his income quite a bit, as they’d have to pay for his silence.’

‘Ah,’ said Rollison, ‘clever chap.’

‘Clever, yes,’ said Kennedy, ‘but not as clever as I am. He thought he would be able to make enough out of it to work for himself. He wasn’t even scared when I had his train shot up. Remember that? Everything went well for him until he lost the papers.’

‘Lost?’ echoed Rollison.

‘Sure … lost. Finnigan stole them. Finnigan had a conscience!’ Kennedy laughed, mirthlessly. ‘Drayton told Finnigan that the sale of those papers to the States would help to kill export, so Finnigan got them and posted them to the girl. Horniman had to find out who’d got them. He went down to Bournemouth and interviewed all the people he thought might have them. At the same time he worked on Susan Lancaster. He had to convince the Americans that Drayton was dead, and the best way to do that, he decided, was to announce their marriage.’ Kennedy laughed again. ‘But I put a stop to that. The Lenwell woman was wise enough to see it my way.’

Once started, it seemed that Kennedy could not stop talking. ‘Horniman wasn’t any good *outside* blackmail,’ he went on. ‘He didn’t know how to work when the papers were lost, he couldn’t think clearly when the marriage announcement failed to appear. He lost his head. He’d been foolish enough to tell Susan that he was associated with the Hammer Club. He was afraid she would remember it, and decided to kill her. He hired a man named Welling for that job, but you stopped him, didn’t you?’

Rollison gave an ironical bow.

‘And I stopped Horniman, and did the same to Finnigan. Then

I found that Benson was in the racket with them, so I dealt with him. That left me with only two worries: you and the Hammer. I wasn't worried for long about the Hammer. I'd found out where he lived. I put the police on to him.'

He paused to light a cigarette, and then went on: 'From the time I started operating in the East End, I found two names kept cropping up – yours and the Hammer's. It began to bore me, and I decided to do something about it.'

Kennedy seemed, literally, to grow bigger as he sat there. 'Beginning to see what you're up against, Rollison? I've got an organisation larger than anything you've ever thought of, and I've got the people on my side. If there's any trouble, I've only got to say "Hammer" and my men will get protection.'

'Quite a programme,' murmured Rollison.

'Most of the time I work according to plan,' Kennedy said, with a satisfied laugh, 'but my arrangements are elastic, Rollison. One of the people whose advertisement you answered was at the club, and boasted because he was impressed by the name Rollison. I thought I would blow along instead of him. I—'

'Since you're telling the story, why don't you tell the truth about it?' demanded Rollison, mildly. 'Please yourself, of course.'

'I'll please myself all right,' said Kennedy. He hesitated, and then gave an explosive laugh. 'I'd been watching you. I knew you were busy on this job. I saw that crack-pot of a man of yours. He posted a bunch of letters in a box near Gresham Terrace. Ever thought of applying suction to a pillar box, Rollison?'

'Not really,' murmured Rollison.

Kennedy went on: 'I don't know how you got on to me, Rollison. It doesn't matter much. I've got *you.* And you're going to get those papers for me. Unless I get them and find they're the right ones, you know what will happen.'

'Do I have to say my little piece again?' demanded Rollison.

'No,' said Kennedy, 'you needn't waste your breath. I'm not playing your way. I'll give you twenty-four hours to think better of it. I want the papers tomorrow night at half-past ten. I'll telephone you at nine o'clock to tell you where I'll pick them up, and *tomorrow* you'd better have them with you.'

Rollison murmured: 'Don't you think it's risky to let me go?'

‘You won’t find me, no one will find me,’ Kennedy boasted. ‘You’ll be blindfolded going out the same way as you came in. You may think you’ve got a chance, but don’t forget this. It takes about half a second to jab with the syringe, and not very much longer for the victim to die. If a policeman knocks at this door, Rollison, I’ll use the needle. But they won’t come, I know your kind. You’re too fond of Susan, aren’t you?’

Rollison looked at Susan, who spoke for the first time:

‘Don’t let him kill Bruce,’ she said. ‘I can’t think beyond that Rolly. Don’t let him kill Bruce.’

‘He won’t,’ said Kennedy.

Rollison murmured: ‘Aren’t you at all frightened of the Hammer, Kennedy?’

Kennedy laughed, and pressed a thumb against the table. ‘That’s where I’ve got the Hammer,’ he said. ‘Just there. He’s got a weakness, they’ve all got a weakness. One only has to find it. His is for Janet Piper. Even if I didn’t know where to put my hands on him, he’ll come running when he hears I’ve got that girl where I want her, and I shall pick her up tomorrow. Don’t worry about the Hammer.’ He turned to the man at the door. ‘Take Rollison out. The interview is over.’

The man stepped forward. ‘Not *quite* so fast,’ he said, and as Kennedy started, he pulled something from his pocket.

Kennedy’s eyes bulged; Rollison felt a shock of surprise so great that he backed against the table.

In the man’s hand was a hammer.

Chapter Twenty-Five

The Hammer Falls

There was deathly silence in the room.

Kennedy sagged in his chair as he watched the man slowly advance.

It *was* the Hammer.

The build was right the features right. A little clever alteration to the face had been enough to deceive Rollison. Even as he watched the man, he wondered whether he would have seen through the disguise if he had been in a position to study him closely. But that did not matter; there was the Hammer, advancing steadily hammer upraised; and in his left hand, held just as steadily, and pointing towards Kennedy, was a small automatic.

Kennedy cried: 'Don't—don't be a *fool!*'

'Keep quite still,' said the Hammer, and the voice was the soft, cultured voice of the man at Milch Street. 'If you are difficult, Kennedy, I shall shoot you, I have no love of violence, but there are times—' he broke off.

He was two yards from the man.

'Turn round,' he said.

Kennedy did not move. He seemed stiff with fright.

'Turn *round*.'

Kennedy drew in a sobbing breath, and slowly obeyed. He crouched. He put his hand to his head as if to protect himself. He knew what the Hammer was going to do …

The Hammer said: 'You killed Benson like this, in my name, Kennedy. And you have committed other crimes of violence in my name. I think rough justice—'

'No!' screeched Kennedy, 'no!'

The Hammer raised his right arm.

'What a craven coward you are,' he said.

Rollison lunged forward, then lost his balance and sprawled across the table. He did not see the Hammer back away, nor see

Kennedy swing round, pulling at the drawer in the table. He heard a shot. When he regained his balance, he saw Kennedy standing uncertainly, with blood coming from his right hand. The table drawer was partly open, and inside was a small automatic.

The Hammer's revolver was smoking, and he was looking at Rollison.

'Thank you,' he said.

Rollison grinned weakly. 'A pleasure,' he murmured.

'You reminded me once before that the one crime one cannot expiate is murder, didn't you? For a moment, I forgot that,' said the Hammer. 'I am glad you were here to remind me,'

Kennedy said; 'There's a fortune, a *fortune*—'

'You will not be able to bribe me,' said the Hammer. 'Go and stand against the wall on the far side of the room.' He waited until Kennedy had obeyed, and then handed his gun to Rollison. 'I am very glad I was here,' he said. 'I have been bribing one of Kennedy's men for some time. Today I took his place,' He paused, then asked: 'Watch him for a few minutes. I will go and deal with the other men here.' He smiled. 'No, I shall not forget that murder is beyond the pale!' There was a laugh in his voice as he went out.

Susan jumped up. 'Bruce!' she exclaimed. 'I must see—'

'Wait a moment,' Rollison said.

The 'moment' lengthened. Five minutes of it had barely gone before Kennedy slid unconscious to the floor. The fright, shock, and pain had proved too much for him.

Then the door of the room opened, and the Hammer came in again.

'There are only three of them,' he said, 'and they are safely locked up in a small pantry. The police will soon look after them, I have no doubt He looked at Susan, and nodded in answer to her look of expectancy. Yes, go up to him. Tell him he need not worry any more.' He opened the door and Susan went running out. He closed it again and smiled at Rollison.

'It is not quite what you expected, is it?'

'Not quite,' Rollison said.

'Why did you really come here? Just to exchange places with the other two?'

'No. I knew Kennedy would never agree to that, but it seemed

the only thing to do,' said Rollison. 'And I hoped the police would find this, in due course.' He took some rice out of his pocket and dropped it about the floor, 'Very Hans Andersen, I'm afraid; and I don't think it would have worked.' He gave a short laugh and then grew serious. 'I think he would have killed them,' he said, 'that's why I say "Thanks".'

'Yes, he would have killed them,' said the Hammer. 'He has told you everything you need to know, Rollison. There is not much to add from me. I let you think Benson was the other Hammer because I wanted to deal with Kennedy myself. It is true, you know, that I have tried to do good. I shall continue to try. And I shall assure everyone that you are to be *persona grata* in my special province. Does that please you?'

'No,' said Rollison, quietly.

The Hammer raised his eyebrows.

'I hoped that it would be all you required, my friend.'

Rollison said: 'When this is over, what then? A temporary lull in the search for the Hammer until he starts working again, and then a hunt that must be successful one day. You can't remain safe from the law for ever.'

'I shall do all the good I can for as long as I can.'

'It won't be much of a life for Janet,' Rollison said. 'Already she knows what it's like to feel that you are being hunted down, to live in perpetual fear that the police will catch you. No, it won't be much of a life for her.'

'She will not work with me again,' said the Hammer. 'We shall get married, she will live in comfort, and I—'

'Every hour, every minute that you're away from her she will wonder whether you are safe,' said Rollison. 'Whenever she sees a policeman she will flinch. It's no life for a woman. And at any time she might lose you. You may have a run for a few years, but it will probably be much less than that. Give it up, Hammer.'

The Hammer said slowly: 'There are times when I get tired of it, but too many people look to me for help, Rollison, and I am not a rich man. I have enough for a comfortable life myself, but —' he shrugged his shoulders. 'Do you find it so hard to understand? No one has ever suffered hardship from anything I have done. No one will. One day, perhaps, I shall accumulate enough wealth to be able to help without taking risks myself,

but it will be a long time, and until then I need go on.'

'What is it that really appeals?' asked Rollison. 'The excitement?'

The Hammer shook his head. 'Far more prosaic than that. It is simply a case of necessity.'

'The police have your files,' said Rollison. 'I can get copies of them.'

The Hammer narrowed his eyes.

'I don't understand you.'

Rollison said; 'I *am* wealthy.'

The Hammer started. 'You mean that *you* would continue to make the payments—' he broke off.

'Why not?' asked Rollison.

The Hammer said slowly: 'If only I could believe you.'

'You can,' Rollison insisted. 'I have more money than I know what to do with, so it will be no sacrifice.' He laughed, a little constrainedly. 'Give me a month's trial, anyhow,' he said, 'let Janet find out whether I'm keeping my word.' When the Hammer did not answer, he went on: I've worked with the police for nearly twelve years, and I *know* they always get their man. The only men who escape are those who retire in time. You've a chance. It won't come again.

After a long pause, the Hammer said. 'I think I will take you at your word, Rollison.'

He put out his hand, Rollison took it.

The Hammer went out and closed the door gently behind him. Kennedy, on the floor, began to come round.

Snub put his head round the door of the sitting-room at Gresham Terrace and asked whether Rollison was busy. He came in. 'I'm just in time for tea, judging from the sounds in the kitchen,' he added hopefully. 'How's your arm?'

'Out of the sling,' said Rollison.

'One arm or two doesn't seem to make much difference to you,' said Snub, cheerfully. 'I thought I'd give the typewriter a rest, because someone just brought me a present,' He glanced at the wall of souvenirs, and grinned. 'It ought to go up there nicely,' he went on, 'provided Jolly doesn't disagree. Like to see it?'

'Now what's all this about?' asked Rollison, patiently.

From beneath his coat, Snub brought forth a hammer. He chuckled as he put it on the table.

'It came by registered post,' he said, 'with a covering letter asking me to bring it round to you on the sender's wedding day. I wonder who he is,' said Snub. 'Some cheerful, benevolent-looking chappie whom all the neighbours admire, I suppose. How's Bruce Drayton?'

'Putting on weight and doing very nicely.'

'More wedding bells and silver-plated toast-racks,' said Snub. 'By the way, I met Grice in Whitehall this morning, all's well there, too.'

Jolly, bringing in tea, looked at the hammer with a faint smile. 'Between the top hat and the poison case, I should think, sir,' he said. 'I—excuse me one moment, sir.' The front-door bell began to ring, and Jolly hurried off.

Snub, ever curious, went after him.

There was a thump in the hall, and Rollison looked up to see a burly man in peaked cap, and green baize apron, carrying a barrel. The man grinned.

'Bill says to let 'im know when it's empty, Mr Ar. An' 'e wants ter know when you'll be looking in at the *Lion*.'

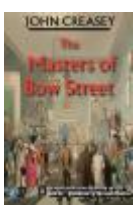
Series Information

Published or to be published by
House of Stratus

Dates given are those of first publication
Alternative titles in brackets

'The Baron' (47 titles) (writing as Anthony Morton)
'Department 'Z'' (28 titles)
'Dr. Palfrey Novels' (34 titles)
'Gideon of Scotland Yard' (22 titles)
'Inspector West' (43 titles)
'Sexton Blake' (5 titles)
'The Toff' (59 titles)

along with:



The Masters of Bow Street
This epic novel embraces the story of the Bow Street Runners and the Marine Police, forerunners of the modern police force, who were founded by novelist Henry Fielding in 1748. They were the earliest detective force operating from the courts to enforce the decisions of magistrates. John Creasey's account also gives a fascinating insight into family life of the time and the struggle between crime and justice, and ends with the establishment of the Metropolitan Police after the passing of Peel's Act in 1829.

‘The Baron’ Series

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Meet the Baron *(The Man in the Blue Mask) (1937)*
2. The Baron Returns *(The Return of the Blue Mask) (1937)*
3. The Baron Again *(Salute Blue Mask) (1938)*
4. The Baron at Bay *(Blue Mask at Bay) (1938)*
5. Alias the Baron *(Alias Blue Mask) (1939)*
6. The Baron at Large *(Challenge Blue Mask!) (1939)*
7. Versus the Baron *(Blue Mask Strikes Again) (1940)*
8. Call for the Baron *(Blue Mask Victorious) (1940)*
9. The Baron Comes Back *(1943)*
10. A Case for the Baron *(1945)*
11. Reward for the Baron *(1945)*
12. Career for the Baron *(1946)*
13. Blood Diamond *(The Baron and the Beggar) (1947)*
14. Blame the Baron *(1948)*
15. A Rope for the Baron *(1948)*
16. Books for the Baron *(1949)*
17. Cry for the Baron *(1950)*
18. Trap the Baron *(1950)*
19. Attack the Baron *(1951)*
20. Shadow the Baron *(1951)*
21. Warn the Baron *(1952)*
22. The Baron Goes East *(1953)*
23. The Baron in France *(1953)*
24. Danger for the Baron *(1953)*
25. The Baron Goes Fast *(1954)*
26. Nest-Egg for the Baron *(Deaf, Dumb and Blonde) (1954)*
27. Help from the Baron *(1955)*
28. Hide the Baron *(1956)*
29. The Double Frame *(Frame the Baron) (1957)*
30. Blood Red *(Red Eye for the Baron) (1958)*
31. If Anything Happens to Hester *(Black for the Baron) (1959)*
32. Salute for the Baron *(1960)*
33. The Baron Branches Out *(A Branch for the Baron) (1961)*
34. The Baron and the Stolen Legacy *(Bad for the Baron) (1962)*
35. A Sword for the Baron *(The Baron and the Mogul Swords) (1963)*
36. The Baron on Board *(The Mask of Sumi) (1964)*
37. The Baron and the Chinese Puzzle *(1964)*
38. Sport for the Baron *(1966)*
39. Affair for the Baron *(1967)*
40. The Baron and the Missing Old Masters *(1968)*

41. The Baron and the Unfinished Portrait *(1969)*
42. Last Laugh for the Baron *(1970)*
43. The Baron Goes A-Buying *(1971)*
44. The Baron and the Arrogant Artist *(1972)*
45. Burgle the Baron *(1973)*
46. The Baron - King Maker *(1975)*
47. Love for the Baron *(1979)*

Doctor Palfrey Novels

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Traitor's Doom *(1942)*
2. The Legion of the Lost *(1943)*
3. The Valley of Fear *(The Perilous Country) (1943)*
4. Dangerous Quest *(1944)*
5. Death in the Rising Sun *(1945)*
6. The Hounds of Vengeance *(1945)*
7. Shadow of Doom *(1946)*
8. The House of the Bears *(1946)*
9. Dark Harvest *(1947)*
10. The Wings of Peace *(1948)*
11. The Sons of Satan *(1948)*
12. The Dawn of Darkness *(1949)*
13. The League of Light *(1949)*
14. The Man Who Shook the World *(1950)*
15. The Prophet of Fire *(1951)*
16. The Children of Hate *(The Killers of Innocence; The Children of Despair) (1952)*
17. The Touch of Death *(1954)*
18. The Mists of Fear *(1955)*
19. The Flood *(1956)*
20. The Plague of Silence *(1958)*
21. Dry Spell *(The Drought) (1959)*
22. The Terror *(1962)*
23. The Depths *(1963)*
24. The Sleep *(1964)*
25. The Inferno *(1965)*
26. The Famine *(1967)*
27. The Blight *(1968)*
28. The Oasis *(1970)*
29. The Smog *(1970)*
30. The Unbegotten *(1971)*
31. The Insulators *(1972)*
32. The Voiceless Ones *(1973)*
33. The Thunder-Maker *(1976)*
34. The Whirlwind *(1979)*

Gideon Series

(Writing as JJ Marric)

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Gideon's Day *(Gideon of Scotland Yard) (1955)*
2. Seven Days to Death *(Gideon's Week) (1956)*
3. Gideon's Night *(1957)*
4. A Backwards Jump *(Gideon's Month) (1958)*
5. Thugs and Economies *(Gideon's Staff) (1959)*
6. Gideon Combats Influence *(Gideon's Risk) (1960)*
7. Gideon's Fire *(1961)*
8. A Conference for Assassins *(Gideon's March) (1962)*
9. Travelling Crimes *(Gideon's Ride) (1963)*
10. An Uncivilised Election *(Gideon's Vote) (1964)*
11. Criminal Imports *(Gideon's Lot) (1965)*
12. To Nail a Serial Killer *(Gideon's Badge) (1966)*
13. From Murder to a Cathedral *(Gideon's Wrath) (1967)*
14. Gideon's River *(1968)*
15. Darkness and Confusion *(Gideon's Power) (1969)*
16. Sport, Heat & Scotland Yard *(Gideon's Sport) (1970)*
17. Gideon's Art *(1971)*
18. No Relaxation at Scotland Yard *(Gideon's Men) (1972)*
19. Impartiality Against the Mob *(Gideon's Press) (1973)*
20. Not Hidden by the Fog *(Gideon's Fog) (1975)*
21. Good and Justice *(Gideon's Drive) (1976)*
22. Vigilantes & Biscuits *(Gideon's Force) (1978)*

Inspector West Series

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Inspector West Takes Charge *(1942)*
2. Go Away to Murder *(Inspector West Leaves Town) (1943)*
3. An Apostle of Gloom *(Inspector West At Home) (1944)*
4. Inspector West Regrets *(1945)*
5. Holiday for Inspector West *(1946)*
6. Battle for Inspector West *(1948)*
7. The Case Against Paul Raeburn *(Triumph for Inspector West) (1948)*
8. Inspector West Kicks Off *(Sport for Inspector West) (1949)*
9. Inspector West Alone *(1950)*
10. Inspector West Cries Wolf *(The Creepers) (1950)*
11. The Figure in the Dusk *(A Case for Inspector West) (1951)*
12. The Dissemblers *(Puzzle for Inspector West) (1951)*
13. The Case of the Acid Throwers *(The Blind Spot; Inspector West at Bay) (1952)*
14. Give a Man a Gun *(A Gun for Inspector West) (1953)*
15. Send Inspector West *(1953)*
16. So Young, So Cold, So Fair *(A Beauty for Inspector West; The Beauty Queen Killer) (1954)*
17. Murder Makes Haste *(Inspector West Makes Haste; The Gelignite Gang; Night of the Watchman) (1955)*
18. Murder: One, Two, Three *(Two for Inspector West) (1955)*
19. Death of a Postman *(Parcels for Inspector West) (1956)*
20. Death of an Assassin *(A Prince for Inspector West) (1956)*
21. Hit and Run *(Accident for Inspector West) (1957)*
22. The Trouble at Saxby's *(Find Inspector West; Doorway to Death) (1957)*
23. Murder, London - New York *(1958)*
24. Strike for Death *(The Killing Strike) (1958)*
25. Death of a Racehorse *(1959)*
26. The Case of the Innocent Victims *(1959)*
27. Murder on the Line *(1960)*
28. Death in Cold Print *(1961)*
29. The Scene of the Crime *(1961)*
30. Policeman's Dread *(1962)*
31. Hang the Little Man *(1963)*
32. Look Three Ways at Murder *(1964)*
33. Murder, London - Australia *(1965)*
34. Murder, London - South Africa *(1966)*
35. The Executioners *(1967)*
36. So Young to Burn *(1968)*

37. Murder, London - Miami *(1969)*
38. A Part for a Policeman *(1970)*
39. Alibi for Inspector West *(1971)*
40. A Splinter of Glass *(1972)*
41. The Theft of Magna Carta *(1973)*
42. The Extortioners *(1974)*
43. A Sharp Rise in Crime *(1978)*

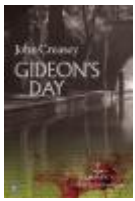
‘The Toff’ Series

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

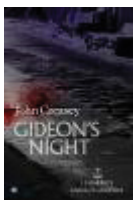
1. Introducing the Toff *(It’s the Toff!) (1938)*
2. The Toff Goes On *(1939)*
3. The Toff Steps Out *(1939)*
4. Here Comes the Toff *(1940)*
5. The Toff Breaks In *(1940)*
6. Salute the Toff *(1941)*
7. The Toff Proceeds *(1941)*
8. The Toff Goes to Market *(1942)*
9. The Toff Is Back *(1942)*
10. The Toff on the Trail *(short stories) (1942)*
11. The Toff among the Millions *(1943)*
12. Accuse the Toff *(1943)*
13. The Toff and the Deadly Priest *(The Toff and the Curate) (1944)*
14. The Toff and the Great Illusion *(1944)*
15. Feathers for the Toff *(1945)*
16. The Toff and the Lady *(1946)*
17. Poison for the Toff *(The Toff on Ice) (1946)*
18. Hammer the Toff *(1947)*
19. The Toff in Town *(1948)*
20. The Toff Takes Shares *(1948)*
21. The Toff and Old Harry *(1949)*
22. The Toff on Board *(1949)*
23. Fool the Toff *(1950)*
24. Kill the Toff *(1950)*
25. A Knife for the Toff *(1951)*
26. A Mask for the Toff *(The Toff Goes Gay) (1951)*
27. Hunt the Toff *(1952)*
28. Call the Toff *(1953)*
29. The Toff Down Under *(Break the Toff) (1953)*
30. Murder Out of the Past *(short stories) (1953)*
31. The Toff at Camp *(The Toff at Butlins) (1954)*
32. The Toff at the Fair *(1954)*
33. A Six for the Toff *(A Score for the Toff) (1955)*
34. The Toff and the Deep Blue Sea *(1955)*
35. Kiss the Toff *(Make-Up for the Toff) (1956)*
36. The Toff in New York *(1956)*
37. Model for the Toff *(1957)*
38. The Toff on Fire *(1957)*
39. The Toff and the Stolen Tresses *(1958)*
40. Terror for the Toff *(The Toff on the Farm) (1958)*

41. Double for the Toff *(1959)*
42. The Toff and the Runaway Bride *(1959)*
43. A Rocket for the Toff *(1960)*
44. The Toff and the Kidnapped *(The Kidnapped Child) (1960)*
45. Follow the Toff *(1961)*
46. The Toff and the Toughs *(The Toff and the Teds) (1961)*
47. A Doll for the Toff *(1963)*
48. Leave It to the Toff *(1963)*
49. The Toff and the Spider *(1965)*
50. The Toff in Wax *(1966)*
51. A Bundle for the Toff *(1967)*
52. Stars for the Toff *(1968)*
53. The Toff and the Golden Boy *(1969)*
54. The Toff and the Fallen Angels *(1970)*
55. Vote for the Toff *(1971)*
56. The Toff and the Trip-Trip-Triplets *(1972)*
57. The Toff and the Terrified Taxman *(1973)*
58. The Toff and the Sleepy Cowboy *(1975)*
59. The Toff and the Crooked Copper *(1977)*

Select Synopses

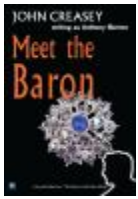


Gideon's Day
Gideon's day is a busy one. He balances family commitments with solving a series of seemingly unrelated crimes from which a plot nonetheless evolves and a mystery is solved. One of the most senior officers within Scotland Yard, George Gideon's crime solving abilities are in the finest traditions of London's world famous police headquarters. His analytical brain and sense of fairness is respected by colleagues and villains alike.



Gideon's Night
On this particular night Commander George Gideon has to deal with a couple of psychopaths who trail pain and blood in their wake. One targets infants, and the other young women on London's foggy streets. There's also an explosive gang war in the offing, and one way or another all of these cases are coming to their breathtaking conclusions at the same time. Can Scotland Yard's finest cope with such a nightmarish scenario, with what would ordinarily be months of time consuming police work crammed into just one night?

Gideon's Fire
Commander George Gideon of Scotland Yard has to deal successively with news of a mass murderer, a depraved maniac, and the deaths of a family in an arson attack on an old building south of the river. This leaves little time for the crisis developing at home …



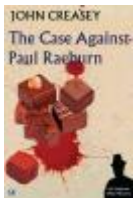
Meet the Baron
John Mannering (*The Baron*) makes his first appearance in this volume. Lord Fauntley cannot help showing off both his daughter and the security under which his precious jewels are kept. Mannering finds himself attracted to both.… Money is tight and so he plans a burglary, but this fails and unexpected consequnces result. The relationship with Lorna Fauntley flourishes, and a series of high profile thefts and adventures ensure Mannering's future, so he believes, until Lorna equates him with *The Baron*. One of the many further twists in this award winning novel occurs when the police appear to seek Mannering's help, only to have everything turned upside down as the plot develops …

Shadow The Baron
John Mannering ('*The Baron*') is called in by Scotland Yard's Superintendent Bristow to help catch the mysterious jewel thief '*The Shadow*'. No one know the thief's identity, but he has managed to pull off many high profile robberies. However, as Mannering proceeds to track down the target, he finds the pursuer becomes the pursued. …

The House of the Bears
Standing alone in the bleak Yorkshire Moors is Sir Rufus Marne's *'House of the Bears'*. Dr. Palfrey is asked to journey there to examine an invalid - whom he finds has disappeared. Moreover, Marne's daughter lies terribly injured after a fall from the minstrel's gallery, which Dr. Palfrey discovers was no accident. He sets out to look into both matters, but the discoveries he makes are truly fantastic. A deserted mine, powerful explosive and a submarine all feature

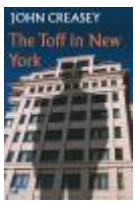
in this powerful mystery. The results are even capable of surprising him …

Inspector West Takes Charge
Extortion is the name of the game, as one victim after another is ruthlessly targeted. Chief Inspector Roger West must now solve the problem, along with a tangle of murders - but the case becomes more frightening as every minute passes.



The Case Against Paul Raeburn
Chief Inspector Roger West has been watching and waiting for over two years - he is determined to catch Paul Raeburn out. The millionaire racketeer may have made a mistake, following the killing of a small time crook. Can the ace detective triumph over the evil Raeburn in what are very difficult circumstances? This cannot be assumed as not eveything, it would seem, is as simple as it first appears.....

Introducing The Toff
The Toff is the Hon. Richard Rollison; the ultimate sleuth who revels in solving crimes. Whilst returning home across the Essex countryside from a day's cricket at his father's Norfolk home, he happens upon an accident that sets him on a new trail. This involves murder, suspense and thrilling action as The Toff applies his mind with its usual precision and thoroughness.



The Toff in New York
'Say, Miss Hall, I hope that brother of yours hasn't run into any trouble.' But Will Hall had been kidnapped and the Honourable Richard Rollison, known by many by the apt if absurd soubriquet of the *'Toff'* is soon on the scene, but not before a murdered man had fallen into Valerie Hallís arms.

There's lots of action in 'millionaire surroundings', with a rich private eye and the NYPD all on the case, whilst the Toff tracks Dutch Himmy, surely the worst man in New York.....

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